

TO FACILITATE INDUSTRIES IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS

PM decides to amend Delhi masterplan

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 21. A decision to amend the masterplan of Delhi was taken today at the level of the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Minister for Urban Development, Mr. Jagmohan, even as the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha raised the issue and demanded immediate Central action to overcome the problems faced by lakhs of workers in Delhi as a result of threatened closure of industrial units.

Apparently, after the Bharatiya Janata Party MPs from Delhi met Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Jagmohan, a decision was taken to initiate immediate steps to amend the masterplan, for allowing the industrial units to function in residential areas of Delhi, provided they do not employ more than nine persons and do not need more than 5 kW electricity.

It seems that after Mr. Vajpayee took this far-reaching decision which would allow commercial activity in all residential areas of the capital, a reluctant Mr. Jagmohan agreed to take the initiative.

The issue was raised in the Rajya Sabha by the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Manmohan Singh. Dr. Singh and some other members pointed out that while everyone respected the Supreme Court order related to polluting industries in Delhi, urgent steps needed to be taken to ensure that thousands of industrial units did not close down and render lakhs of workers unemployed.

Dixit leads march

By Our Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI, NOV. 21. Normal life was disrupted for the third consecu-



The Delhi Chief Minister, Ms. Sheila Dixit, making a point agitatedly to mediapersons outside the Prime Minister's house on the issue of closure of polluting units, after she met the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, on Tuesday.— PTI

tive day in the Capital today even as the Congress Legislature Party led by the Delhi Chief Minister, Ms. Sheila Dixit, marched to the Prime Minister's residence and then to Rashtrapati Bhavan in the evening to register their protest against Centre's failure to amend Delhi's masterplan which, they said, led to the closure of thousands of industries.

Though industrial workers and owners again took to the streets protesting against the closure of units operating out of non-conforming areas, the violence paled in comparison to Monday. However, traffic flow was adversely affected in some areas and the police was compelled to use force.

As decided by the CLP on Monday evening, the Chief Minister led a delegation to Race Course Road and then to the President's House. According to Ms. Dixit, the Prime Minister assured that a pol-

icy with regard to functioning of industries in the Capital would be announced in Parliament tomorrow.

Ms. Dixit told the Prime Minister that it was not possible to relocate or close down more than one lakh industries as the bread and butter of over 20 lakh people was directly linked to it.

Earlier in the day the Supreme Court made it clear to the Delhi Government that it would not withdraw or allow go slow in respect of its earlier orders "if hooligans take to the streets".

This was in response to an application filed by the Delhi Government stating that it feared more loss of lives. But the court asked the Government to wait till November 28 when the contempt notice issued to the Chief Secretary would be heard.

Court puts its foot down: Page 15

THE HINDU

22 NOV 2000

Civil rights activist hacked

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2/11
FROM G.S. RADHAKRISHNA

Hyderabad, Nov. 23: Civil rights activist P. Purushottam was hacked to death in public this morning by unknown assailants.

Purushottam was the joint secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee.

The 40-year-old advocate, a resident of neighbouring Mahaboobnagar district, was attacked by four assailants with axes and knives as he stepped out of a general store at Madhurapuri in Ranga Reddy district.

Fifteen people stood mute witnesses as the assailants sped away in a Tata Sumo that did not have number plates, after killing the activist.

Purushottam had been threatened by opponents of Naxalites a number of times.

The activist's wife blamed the police for her husband's death, but superintendent of police N.V. Surendra Babu denied this.

This is the third killing of civil rights activists in the state in the last two decades. In the early Eighties, J.L. Reddy, vice-president of the same civil liberties committee, was killed by police.

Another committee activist, Ramanatham, was killed in Warangal few years later.

Activist K.G. Kannabiran and former committee secretary Balgopal were often threatened by both police and anti-Naxalites in the city.

Government documents show the committee a frontal organisation of the Naxalites. In those districts, local advocates and organisers are threatened against taking up committee activities.

THE TELEGRAPH

9 NOV 2011

Beyond his control?

GIVEN BIHAR'S reputation, periodic outbreak of caste or Naxalite-inspired violence no longer seem to jolt the national conscience, even when the toll is shockingly high. However, Friday's massacre of 11 members of the Yadav community in Siwan's Mojahid village and the subsequent gunning down of five people in Nalanda district do not fall under the category of either caste violence or ideologically inspired carnage. While RJD MP Mohammed Shahabuddin's name is being mentioned in connection with the Siwan incident, the Nalanda episode is a clear case of gang rivalry. Despite serious criminal charges against Shahabuddin, he virtually operates outside the legal and police system in the state. He and his band of goons have spread a reign of terror in the region for several years now but the RJD Government has refused to touch them.

The Siwan massacre appears to be a fallout of a battle of supremacy between two gangs over a plot of land belonging to a *math*. Bihar's semi-feudal agrarian structure and the nexus between crime and politics provide an ideal breeding ground for gang wars. That a number of groups bank on their masters' political connections and collude with the police is an open secret. It is the inexorable dynamics of terror and counter-terror which explains the bloodletting that occurs with sickening frequency. The state Government has neither the ability nor the political will to take on either the private armies of the upper castes, or the Naxalite formations. The RJD's complacency can be understood by the 'political success' of the Laloo-Rabri Devi combine who have held onto power by manipulating the Muslim-Yadav (MY) card. And though Dalits and some backward castes have deserted the RJD, the Muslims continue to vote for the party in the absence of any other alternative.

However, the 'MY factor', which was Mr Yadav's contribution to the vocabulary of Bihar politics, is bound to come under strain following the Siwan massacre. The still incipient rupture between the Muslims and Yadavs has been sharpened by the 'Ali Sena' which has been floated in southern Bihar by rich Muslim landlords. At the moment, the Sena's wrath is directed against the Maoist Communist Centre, but such private armies are rarely so disciplined as to fight only one enemy. Laloo Yadav's one achievement has been to keep Bihar relatively free of communal trouble. But the signs in the horizon are not propitious. If things are allowed to drift, he may soon be outmanoeuvred by forces beyond his control.

Eleven Yadavs gunned down in Bihar

MALINI VERMA

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SIWAN, Oct. 14. — Eleven members of a Yadav family, including a minor girl, were gunned down by assailants allegedly belonging to the gang of the Rashtriya Janata Dal MP, Md Sahabuddin, at Mojahid village of north Bihar's Siwan district in the wee hours today.

The incident was said to be a fallout of the protracted gang war between the "don" of Siwan, Md Sahabuddin, and the Samata Party "strongman" Mr Satish Pandey. They are allegedly locked in the battle to control a "math" possessing over 200 acre of land.

Witnesses said over 50 people with sophisticated weapons swooped down on the village at 2 p.m. and fired indiscriminately. All the 11 victims died on the spot.

The victims were identified as Raghubir Yadav (55), his brothers Jadubir Yadav (50), Mahavir Yadav (30) and Jardan Yadav (25), their sons Raju (10), Hareeram (20), Lakhandeo (25), Dahari (23), Janakdeo (18), Vinay (15) and the girl Sanju (9).

"My son Raju was innocent... how shall I live without him?" Raju's mother Kumaro Devi was crying as the body of her son was consigned to flames with those of 10 others.

None of the villagers was willing to be quoted. However, almost everyone of them alleged that the assailants belonged to the "Sahabuddin gang". "I have already told you about the gang, but if I name the gang leader I will be killed tomorrow," said a villager.

The bone of contention, according to the Bihar director general of police, Mr KA Jacob and the villagers, was the Kabirpanthi Math.

It earlier had one Garbo Goswami alias Guruprasad Goswami as its *mahant* (temple keeper). He was popular with the villagers.

The villagers said a few months ago, the RJD MP got Garbo Goswami replaced by Sheoprasad Goswami. Garbo is said to be close to the Samata Party "don" Mr Satish Pandey.

The slain villagers too were said to be sympathisers of Mr Pandey who contested the last Assembly election from the adjoining Darauli constituency.

Today's massacre was preceded by the killing of four persons, two Yadavs and two Muslims, at nearby Chanaur and Shyampur a few days ago.

The four killed at those two villages were reportedly supporters of Sahabuddin and were killed allegedly by the members of the Pandey gang.

Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav faced an angry

mob of villagers when he visited the site. "We don't have any protection... there is no administration worth its name... Siwan DM *ko bhagao* (remove the Siwan DM)", the villagers shouted as the RJD chief reached Mojahid.

Mr Yadav told the villagers that he had directed the Siwan district magistrate to provide guns to all the residents of Mojahid.

The RJD supremo announced a compensation of Rs 1.20 lakh and government jobs besides pucca houses to the dependents of the deceased.

Tension has gripped the entire district in the wake of the carnage. The administration has deployed securitymen in the village.

"But we are living in fear as the police and administration have no control over the criminals who rule the roost in Siwan", said a villager who lost his brother this morning.

THE STATESMAN

15 OCT 2000

Laloo's day out with Rabri

NALIN VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA, Sept. 23. — Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav felt like a change today: a change from his favourite fare of litti, sattu and bhujia, and also probably a change from his now sombre lifestyle as he faces trial in the fodder case. So he took his chief minister wife to a local restaurant, where Bihar's first couple ate dosa and sambhar.

The day was different for the owner of Basant Bihar restaurant too, but he may not have enjoyed it as much as Mr Yadav for he was forced to treat almost an entire neighbourhood to sweets.

After eating his meal of dosa and sambhar, the RJD chief stood lazily at the restaurant door with his wife, dusting his face and hair with a towel. A crowd gathered soon, eager for a glimpse of the celebrity couple chatting like an ordinary one.

"Arre hotelwale, janata ko mithai khilao (Hey hotel owner, distribute sweets among the people gathered here)," Mr Yadav shouted to the hotel owner, a command the latter had no option but to obey. So waiters came out with sweets as the crowd jostled for rassogollas, laddus and pedas.

The RJD chief, meanwhile, called two

journalists of a local Hindi daily on his mobile phone, who came running like "obedient" boys.

"Patrakar logon ko bhi kuch khilao (Give something to the journalists too)," Mr Yadav told the restaurant owner. So the journalists got a treat.

Mr Yadav then walked to a paan shop, holding his wife's hand. "Jaldi paan khilao (I want paan, quick)," he said, and the paanwala obliged.

"Lekin jante ho? Main paan ka paisa nahin deta (But do you know? I don't pay for paan)." Fast came the reply: "Hujur! aap se paisa kaun lega (Sir, who will ask for money from you?)"

Ultras try to gouge out villagers' eyes

TI & UNI

AMMU, Sept. 23. — Militants at a Doda village tried to gouge out the eyes of two women and a boy whose family refused to bow to pressure, it was revealed today.

Hafeeza, Pissibi and Abdullah were tied up and beaten, and hot iron rods were placed on their eyes. About 200 villagers who watched the spectacle were told this was what they would get if they did not behave. The three were treated at the government hospital at Batote, after troops rescued them from the Warwan area, a defence spokesman said.

Some foreign mercenaries went to Khida village in July this year, the spokesman said. They made demands on the villagers, and those who refused to oblige them were beaten up, tortured and even killed. The defence spokesman said they spoke Urdu/Punjabi.

Intrusion bid foiled: Five intruders were killed as the Army scuttled a Pakistani bid to push in armed militants into Kupwara district, defence sources said.

Priya plays the mediator

CL MANOJ
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Sept. 23. — Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, who met Mrs Sonia Gandhi today, kept up his show of support for Miss Mamata Banerjee's demand for Central intervention in West Bengal.

He told reporters that he had briefed the Congress president about the situation in West Bengal and the "need to bring together forces opposed to communal forces to combat Left Front misrule". But he would not say what Mrs Gandhi felt on the demand that some districts should be declared disturbed.

There was speculation that Mrs Sonia Gandhi may have summoned him to ask about his meeting with the Prime Minister, whom he met along with Miss Banerjee yesterday.

That meeting raised eyebrows in Congress circles. Mr Das Munshi would like one to believe that he was acting on

the party's behalf, but some AICC members think he is trying to project himself as a mediator between the Congress and Miss Banerjee.

Mr Das Munshi himself has thrown out hints that his efforts are aimed at persuading Miss Banerjee to break off with the NDA. "From my experience I can tell you that in West Bengal politics, anyone who maintains links with communal parties will never gain," he told journalists today.

But his colleagues in the Congress don't see Miss Banerjee dumping the BJP, at least not anytime soon, or joining hands with a much-weakened Congress.

Mr Das Munshi released copies of his letters to Mr L K Advani, demanding stern action against the state government.

He not only wants some districts declared disturbed, he also wants the Union government to try to reach a consensus on imposing President's rule in the state.

Temple still on BJP agenda, says Katiyar

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

KANPUR, Sept. 23. — The BJP general secretary, Mr Vinay Katiyar, today said construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya was still a vital issue on the party's agenda and called for an 'out of court' settlement of the Ram Mandir-Babari Masjid dispute to ensure smooth construction of the temple. The issue should have been kept out of the court's purview. But now that a court case had already been filed, ways should be explored to reach consensus for an out-of-court settlement, he said.

Mr Katiyar said the temple issue would never be irrelevant for any political party, the least in Uttar Pradesh.

He admitted that it was not on the agenda of the National Democratic Alliance government's agenda, and the Centre had to function on an agreed common minimum programme. But this by no means meant that the Bharatiya Janata Party had forsaken the issue, he added.

THE STATESMAN

20 SEP 2001

Bill to divide Bihar defies constitutional provisions

11-6 ✓
18/8

By K.K. Singh
The Times of India News Service

PATNA: Contrary to the recent amendment in the Constitution that no delimitation of the constituencies be effected till 2020, the Bihar Reorganisation Bill (BRB), 2000, passed by Parliament early this month, has significantly made certain provisions for delimitation of parliamentary, assembly and council constituencies with the creation of Jharkhand state after the division of Bihar.

Taking into account contradictory and violative provisions in the Bill, doubts are being raised in the legal and political circles if the Bill would stand the scrutiny and validity of the constitutional provisions.

Provisions like extension of membership of the Bihar Legislative Council to seven sitting MLCs, elected from the assembly constituency, till "their present term of office" was violative of the Article 171 of the Constitution. Apart from that, the Bill had allowed retaining of three MLCs, elected from the graduate and teachers constituencies from the tribal belt-cum-north Bihar constituencies, till their terms expired. The Article 171 of the Constitution stipulates: "The total number of members in the legislative council of a state having such council shall not exceed one third of total number of members in the legislative assembly of that state."

Thus, retaining the membership of ten MLCs, who belong to the

Jharkhand region and were earlier elected from the assembly and other constituencies, would cross the limit of one-third members in the upper house, violating the constitutional provisions.

Moreover, the original Bill, circulated to the Bihar Legislature for its views, had provided for the termination of the membership of these seven MLCs. Significantly, the revised Bill, okayed by Parliament, has provided for retaining them as members of the Bihar Legislative Council. Unattached MLC Yashodanand Singh said that the NDA government has retained them as MLCs of successive Bihar legislative council, violating the constitutional provisions since four of them belonged to the BJP.

Former speaker Radhanandan Jha said the Bill would not stand the test of legal scrutiny as it suffered from many infirmities. "Apart from violating article 171 of the constitution, the retaining of seven MLCs is unconstitutional as none of them will be citizens of the successor Bihar, and an outsider cannot be member of the Bihar legislative council elected from assembly constituencies", Mr Jha said.

He added that the President should obtain the opinion of the Attorney General of India on the Bill and refer it to the SC for its opinion if the Bill violated and bypassed the constitutional provisions in dividing Bihar, as was evident from the violation of many

constitutional provisions.

The BRB, 2000, passed by Parliament says: "On and from the appointed day, the delimitation of parliamentary and assembly constituencies order, 1976 and the delimitation of council constituencies (Bihar) order 1951 shall stand amended as directed in the second and fourth schedule respectively of the Constitution." For this, the Bill has empowered the election commission for delimiting the assembly and parliamentary constituencies in both Jharkhand and successor Bihar.

Eminent constitutional lawyer Basudeo Prasad said that BRB, 2000, had been passed by Parliament in haste without giving any serious thoughts on the constitutional provisions. "Major changes like delimitation of the constituencies are violative of the Article 368 of the Constitution, which clearly says, no such law as aforesaid under Article three of the constitution shall be deemed to be an amendment of the Constitution for the purpose of article 368", Mr Prasad said.

He added that while formulating the Bill to divide Bihar, the NDA government assumed many powers to surpass many articles of the Constitution by carrying the Bill by simple majority. "Any major change or surpass of the articles require two-third majority, not simple majority, while carrying out division of any state," Mr Prasad remarked.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

18 AUG 2000

10-12
12/8

Sheikh Hasina fighting on three fronts

Bangla

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, AUG. 12. The ruling Awami League in Bangladesh is fighting three battles all at a time — against the religious fundamentalists backed by the country's main Opposition, and on two fronts relating to the judiciary, to make it accountable and transparent and to expedite the verdict in the Sheikh Mujibur Rahman murder case, pending for the higher judiciary's endorsement since 1998.

All the three battles are crucial as the party is almost at the fag end of its five-year tenure, and the Opposition alliance is monitoring every step of the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina.

While Sheikh Hasina's remarks on granting of bails to hardcore criminals by the High Court have caused an uproar, her assertions that she would, if necessary, come to the court to repeat what she felt, prompted a large number of Opposition lawyers to plan moving a case for contempt of court against her. The case is likely to be filed shortly.

However, denying the charge of contempt of court, Sheikh Hasina on Thursday said that what she had said was in the interest of the people and the rule of law. "What I've said reflects the sentiments of the people. I've not said anything to undermine the judiciary," she told the members of the Dhaka Reporters' Unity, an organisation of the nation's newspapers and news agencies.

In 1997, the Supreme Court had snubbed the Prime Minister for criticising the High Court for granting easy bails to criminals, including murderers. This is for the second time that her remarks on judiciary have triggered an outcry, though the judiciary's actions have already triggered a national debate.

The judiciary has not so far taken any *suo motu* action against the Prime Minister, but 131 Opposition leaders, including Begum Khaleda Zia and Gen. H. M. Ershad, have asked the Sheikh Hasina to exercise restraint, terming her remarks as "the arrogant comments of an autocratic dictator, a threat to the rule of law and a naked provocation to anarchy".

The leaders said that criminals got bails not because of any fault on the part of the judiciary but due to weak charges filed against them by the police. But many still feel that some judges have been overly generous in granting bail to criminals who commit fresh crimes soon after their release. The question of accountability and transparency of the judiciary has, therefore, come to the fore.

The Awami League has also questioned the "abnormal delay" in the execution of the verdict in the Sheikh Mujibur Rahman murder case in which 15 former army officers were sentenced to death in 1998.

The High Court recently started hearing the death references after a number of judges refused to attend the hearing, stating that to do so would "embarrass" them. This has spawned a fresh debate, whether a judge can stay away from a case giving such a reason.

The demand for speedy execution of the verdict has also become a demand of the country's pro-Liberation lobby which is organising hunger strikes in all parts of the country to expedite the trial process.

THE HINDU

13 AUG 2008

14/8 Dhaka's Example 71-10

Think South Asia and what comes to mind are the blood and gore images of Pakistan's so-called jihad against India. Islamabad's repeatedly proclaimed resolve to direct its youth in the direction of holy war appears mediaeval when contrasted with the path taken by neighbouring South Asian countries. While it may be unfair to compare Pakistan with India with its greater resources, IT expertise and economically energetic diaspora, other smaller countries like Bangladesh, once dismissed as the basketcase of South Asia, are determinedly edging past Pakistan in crucial human development indicators. While Pakistan seems unable to get out of its martial law mentality, Bangladesh seems firmly to have put such aberrations behind it. For quite a few years now, it has had a stable political record, barring minor eruptions now and again. The opposition parties have played their role responsibly; indeed, the government is working overtime to pull Bangladesh out of the morass it was in for many years. Last year, despite devastating floods, the country registered a growth rate of 5.2 per cent, a staggering 67 per cent higher than the average in other developing countries. A mature political leadership has diplomatically put aside residual hostilities with neighbours to focus internally on crucial areas of human development. And the results have been rewarding, inspiring Hillary Clinton to write an internationally noticed book on her village experiences in the country.

The transformation of Bangladesh has really come from the grass-roots where its pioneering micro-credit schemes have brought about the kind of social change and women's empowerment other developing countries dream about. From the traditional credit schemes for sewing machines and cattle, the country has now progressed to providing cellular telephones as a form of income generation for village women. This is imaginative thinking at its best — in India, the government still clings to outdated notions that a cellular phone is a luxury in a country where half the population lives below the poverty line. The focus on women has paid off in many ways, the total fertility rate, a crucial determinant of population growth, has fallen to 3.1 in Bangladesh as against five for Pakistan. Significantly, both countries are Islamic societies in which, traditionally, many taboos surround modern methods of family planning. As a result of being freed from the endless burden of child-bearing, Bangladeshi women are increasingly joining the workforce — today female participation in economic activity is almost double that of Pakistan. It should be a sobering thought for India that there are far more women parliamentarians in Bangladesh than here; Pakistan does not even feature in the picture. Dhaka has been able to concentrate on its internal development, thanks also to judicious economic planning which has pushed its external debt down to 37 per cent of the GNP while Pakistan's remains a crippling 53 per cent. The international community is increasingly looking to Bangladesh as a potential economic and social miracle exemplar for South Asia. There is a message in this for Pakistan. It has two choices — continue on the present destructive path or learn from the example of its small neighbour, and erstwhile Siamese twin.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

14 AUG 2001

20/8 WAGES OF SIN 518 Bangladesh in grip of moneypower and mafia

CRIMINALISATION of politics is not a problem in India alone. It is playing havoc in Bangladesh as well. Last week Bangladesh's most reputed economists including Dr Rehman Sobhan and Professor Anisur Rahman publicly regretted the fact that politics had become the country's fastest growing industry and much of it derived strength and sustenance from the mafia. They noted that it had become a major impediment to progress. According to them black money had vitiated the country's political atmosphere. Serving the mafia had become a major occupation with political parties. There is no doubt that the economists by stating unpalatable truths have pricked the Bangladeshi conscience. This may help politicians realise the depths to which they have sunk. But the big question is whether all this plain speaking will help bring them to their senses? Will it bring about the desired change in the political scene? Big money has induced 75 per cent of MPs to take to business. All parties give preference to moneybags while nominating candidates.

Democracy in Bangladesh has become a game for the rich who use money and muscle to retain or wrest power. They have become protectors of leading loan defaulters in a country of scarce financial resources. As a result neither the Awami League nor the BNP, when in power, has been able to fulfil promises. This has created a serious credibility gap for all parties. The economists are right in saying that without properly addressing this problem Bangladesh is heading for disaster.

THE STATESMAN

20 AUG 2000

10.21

Bangladesh on the boil

AHEAD OF a general election in less than a year, the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina's Government is confronting a series of crisis. Some of these derive from the country's independence movement, but others are of more recent origin. Sheikh Hasina, daughter of the country's slain independence hero, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, is up against sharp deterioration of law and order, a fight with the well-organised fundamentalists who are also partners of the Begum Khaleda Zia-led Opposition alliance, and a confrontation with the Judiciary. The law and order scenario, particularly in the capital and the big towns, has turned somewhat alarming. The Home Minister, Mr. Mohammad Nasim, and other top Government functionaries see it as the "outcome of a design" by religious fanatics and anti-Bangladesh forces. They say the spurt in the activities of the underground left groups, especially in the country's south-west, the killings of pro-Government leaders, the looting of arms and ammunition from police stations, and the spate of street muggings are reminiscent of the early 1970s.

But the Opposition sees these as the result of the Government's "inefficiency" in securing peace and security. The Government in turn says it is not getting the required

Ahead of a general election in less than a year, the Sheikh Hasina Government in Bangladesh is facing a series of crises.

HAROON HABIB writes.

support from the Opposition to curb terrorism.

The abortive attempt last month on the Prime Minister at Kotalipara, her home constituency, by an unidentified group, the murder of an investigative journalist, Shamsur Rahman, in Jessore and of an Awami League leader, Abdur Rob, in Khulna, and the gunning down of eight persons, most of them pro-ruling party students leaders, allegedly by armed cadres of the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami in Chittagong, have sent shockwaves through the Government and society at large.

The ruling party and some leading sections of the media blame the religious Right for the suspected attempt on Sheikh Hasina; they liken it to the assassination of her father in 1975. Investigating agencies have not yet submitted the final report, but they reportedly have information that a "foreign

source" was behind the plot carried out by the banned Harkat-ul-Jihad.

But, the Opposition sees undertones of "political victimisation" in the Government's drive against "religious terrorists", complicating the situation further. The Begum Khaleda Zia-led alliance is set to begin a fresh round of nation-wide protests from September. The main objective is to force early elections. The Opposition also has a new stick to beat the Government with: the much-debated question of the accountability and fairness of the judges and lawyers. The controversy started with certain remarks by the Prime Minister while expressing indignation at the courts frequently granting bail to known criminals. It was thought the issue would die down after leading lawyers, including some from Opposition parties, led by the Supreme Court Bar Association president, held a three-hour "fruitful" meeting with Sheikh Hasina on this issue.

But this was not to be. The Supreme Court Bar is now divided over the issue, with many leading lawyers allegedly using the issue for narrow political gains. The President of the Supreme Court Bar Association, Mr. Moinul Hosein, filed a contempt petition against the Prime Minister on August 16 for making "derogatory remarks" about the Judiciary and the Bar. More

than 100 MPs belonging to the Opposition alliance are also going to file another contempt petition against the Prime Minister soon.

Sheikh Hasina, however, remains firm that she did no wrong, and that no remark of hers amounted to contempt of court. Her stand is that she only meant that if even murderers got bail easily, it would be difficult for the Government to curb the present spate of crime. She also said the three organs of the state — the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary — should function as per the Constitution.

The Opposition leaders, including Begum Khaleda Zia, Gen. H. M. Ershad, and Golam Azam, saw Sheikh Hasina's remarks as "naked aggression" on the judiciary. But even less strident critics feel the Prime Minister should not have said what she did in public; though they certainly were highly questionable cases of grant of bail.

The debate over the powers of the Executive and the Judiciary apart, which is not uncommon in many countries, the ruling party is also facing another issue relating to the Judiciary. After several judges faced "embarrassment" in hearing appeals against the death sentences for those convicted for the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the High Court has begun the hearings. But there are allegations of "delay" in disposing the case.

The ruling party and the pro-Liberation lobby in Bangladesh politics want "early execution" of the death sentences, but the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led Opposition says the Government is "coercing the Judiciary" by holding rallies to press the demand. The 1975 coup plotters were tried in a normal court and allowed a full defence, though many of them are still at large.

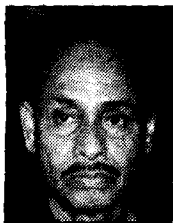
The ruling party also fears that any further delay in execution of the verdict delivered in November 1998 may allow the convicts to escape. They believe that the Opposition parties, who were the beneficiaries of the 1975 bloody changeover, may try and use the delay to save the coup-plotters. Therefore, for the ruling Awami League, which is going to face an united Opposition in the coming polls, the implementation of the court verdict at the earliest is an issue of political survival.

THE HINDU

Ershad under vigil, bandh called in his home district

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DHAKA, Aug. 26. — Bangladesh's security forces are keeping vigil on deposed President Mr HM Ershad even as his party supporters today called a bandh in his home district, Rangpur, following yesterday's violence in a protest rally that left more than 100 people injured, media reports and police said.



Mr HM Ershad

"His movements are being watched by securitymen and visitors who are meeting him at his residence or office are also under vigil," an unnamed agency source was quoted by the United News of Bangladesh as saying.

Mr Ershad has been sentenced to five years in prison and fined more than 50 million

taka by the High Court in a graft case.

His Jatiya Party today called a dawn-to-dusk general strike in northern Rangpur district following violence in the town yesterday where police used batons, tear gas and rubber bullets to break up a rally called against the court judgment. A Jatiya Party MP, a woman leader and 10 policemen were among the injured, the reports said.

Mr Ershad was sentenced to another two years in prison in default in the Janta Tower case in which he was found guilty of "criminal misconduct." He had allegedly bought the high-rise while in power, the price of which was beyond his lawful earnings.

The building was built on government land in Dhaka.

The court ordered confiscation of the building and land and ordered Mr Ershad to surrender. It, however, reduced his jail term to five years, from the

seven years given by the lower court.

Mr Ershad told the *Daily Star* newspaper that he may seek time from the Supreme Court tomorrow to surrender before the trial court.

The Jatiya Party is currently a member of the four-party Opposition alliance headed by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party of Begum Khaleda Zia. The *Bangla Bazar* daily today quoted Mr Ershad as saying that he was not afraid of going to jail.

"I am not afraid of going to jail. In South Africa, Mr Nelson Mandela became the head of state after spending 27 years in prison ... I will fight my case legally," he said.

Asked about his party's fate if he remained in prison, the 71-year-old said: "I am a soldier. I joined politics despite fears of death and struggle. I was in jail for over six years. Did my party become non-existent at that time?"

THE STATESMAN

27 AUG 2000

ABUSE OF DUE PROCESS

Hasina obliged to face hard choices

WHATEVER the fate of the three contempt petitions filed in the Bangladesh High Court against Sheikh Hasina for demanding accountability of the country's judiciary over the grant of easy bail to hardened criminals, it must be said that her comments reflect the current mood of Bangladeshis. In fact, Hasina's articulation of popular sentiment is on the lips of most Bangladeshis who blame the abuse of judicial process and of course the police for the alarming rise in the crime graph. In the last 30 months, in Dhaka alone 191 criminals have gone into hiding after jumping bail. Sheikh Hasina is right when she says that her Government gets blamed unnecessarily for the judiciary's penchant for granting bail as a matter of course. She has in no way undermined the constitution but what she has not admitted is the glaring failure of the police and the prosecution in not being able to keep the criminals behind bars.

Unfortunately Hasina's comments, instead of inducing introspection, are being used by the opposition to settle political scores. What was meant to stir the nation's conscience on a key and sensitive issue has been thoroughly politicised by the Opposition whose leading lights are behind the contempt petitions. They are seeking a remedy both inside and outside the courts. The tragedy of the Bangladesh Opposition is that they have such a myopic view of pressing issues that they lose sight of bigger national concerns. Having so far failed to embarrass and corner the ruling Awami League on any major issue, they thought Hasina's comments provided an excellent handle against her government. The irony is that all those leaders who are now accusing her of having committed contempt of court have never once demanded trial of those who killed Sheikh Mujib and 18 of his family members; indeed they have connived in the outrageous breach of the law. Indeed they have sought to frustrate the current trial of the self-confessed killers. The Opposition refuses to acknowledge the simple truth that the present turmoil in Bangladesh is a direct fallout of Ziaur Rahman's policy of rewarding killers. They do not realise that by not punishing them they are helping to sustain a tainted legacy.

THE STRAIGHT

2011

MONDAY, AUGUST 28, 2000

A 'VISION' FOR ASSAM

WITH EIGHT MONTHS to go for the Assembly elections in Assam, the Chief Minister, Mr. P. K. Mahanta, has come out with a 'Vision 2025' statement for the development of the State. But Mr. Mahanta's AGP Government cannot depend on mere promises or a dream vision to be voted back to power. Thanks to the Centre's initiatives, Assam and other northeastern States have received some special attention in recent months. It needs more than a vision to make things work in this State and the basic objective of the statement of intent is to bring Assam's economic and social indicators on a par with the rest of the country. That itself would be a Herculean task for any Government in Guwahati, given the ground realities and the absence of peace, thanks to the militant and secessionist groups operating in the region. The State's GDP now grows at a modest 3.5 per cent and Mr. Mahanta would like it to reach an ambitious 15 per cent in the next quarter of a century. The per capita income stands at a mere Rs. 1,628. With the Centre and the Northeast Council gearing themselves up to invest in infrastructure development, the real challenge for the Assam Government will be to channel public and private investment into employment-generating ventures that can improve the quality of life of the people.

Just as the Northeast Development Finance Corporation is setting up an IT park in Guwahati, the VSNL has commissioned its international telecommunications gateway in the State capital to connect Assam to the information highway. Apart from providing international connectivity through telephones, the gateway will open up new avenues in the IT sector and link up all district headquarters in the State through the Internet by October. It could take a while for Assam and its sister States in the northeast to fully harness the IT potential and emerge as a viable IT hub. But the gateway could start a communication revo-

lution in the region and boost trade and business. It is up to the Government now to spread computer literacy and make it attractive for investors to set up shop in Assam. But that would certainly necessitate a qualitative improvement in the security environment. Despite the recent surrender of about 3,000 militants, the dastardly killings of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha chief, Bineshwar Brahma, an MLA and a former AASU leader are bound to spark a fresh round of violence. Even as the Centre continues its dialogue with the different groups, the State must contain violence and implement a credible rehabilitation programme for those who have laid down their arms.

Any vision for Assam must first focus on preventing or at least minimising the annual flood havoc. After the recent ravages, the Brahmaputra is still flowing above the danger mark in many areas and rivers like the Siyang have changed course, thanks to the incessant rains, to inundate several villages. Thousands are marooned. Goalpara, Dhubri, Dhemaji, Darrang, Nalban, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Barpeta, Kokrajhar and Karbi Anglong are some of the frequently flood-hit districts. It calls for a massive scheme to tame the rivers, harness the water and use it productively, saving the people from the floods. The annual collapse of the embankments and the protective measures is a clear indication of the callousness and leakages in the implementation of such vital schemes. The message is clear. Assam has to focus not only on service sectors but on returning to the primary sector of the economy as 70 per cent of its people depend on it. In the absence of the private sector in any big way, the people have depended on the State for employment, which it can no longer generate. Population growth has also been on the higher side, compounding the problem of unemployment. More than a vision, the State needs good governance and the political will to make things happen.

THE HINDU

28 AUG 2000

Heavy rains lash Andhra yet again

Residents forced to shift from low-lying areas in Hyderabad

Hyderabad, Aug. 27: A new low pressure area in the Bay of Bengal triggered heavy rains on Sunday in the coastal areas of Andhra Pradesh, fuelling fears of further devastation following the recent havoc wrought by torrential rains and floods.

Under the influence of a depression in Bay of Bengal, heavy rains lashed Srikakulam, Vizianagar, Visakhapatnam, east Godavari, west Godavari and Krishna districts.

"All the reservoirs in the state are full. And fresh rains in the coastal belt are causing concern, particularly the situation in and around Kolleru lake in the Krishna district," chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu said during his visit to the affected areas in Hyderabad.

The Army personnel assisted in plugging a breach in the 115-year-old bund of Sagar tank at Qutbullapur in the outskirts of Hyderabad in the early hours of Sunday even as the state government launched relief operations in 13 flood-affected districts.

The tank had developed a breach late on Saturday night and the gushing waters entered Hussain Sagar Lake causing panic among residents of low-lying areas.

Several families from 12 localities around Qutbullapur, Kutatpally, IDPL colony and Balanagar were evacuated with the help of the Army.

People from low-lying areas

near Langar house tank in the city have also been moved to safer places.

However, there was no threat of breach to Hussain Sagar Lake in the heart of Hyderabad officials said. According to a report from Warangal, nine fishermen were reported missing after they ventured into a stream near Parakal on Sunday. However, three of them were later found clinging to a tree at Lakshmipur village, about 85 km from Hyderabad.

The district administration has requisitioned a helicopter to rescue the three as the current in the water is strong. In Guntur, state health minister R.S. Aruna said 339 mobile medical teams had been set up in the 13 flood-affected districts to check the spread of water-borne diseases.

Meanwhile, environmentalists and citizens' groups said on Sunday that bad urban planning and illegal construction had aggravated flooding in southern India that killed 131 people last week.

Last week's torrential downpour in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh caused large-scale flooding that destroyed property and crops worth Rs 7.7 billion. Twenty people drowned or were buried in collapsing houses. Buildings were inundated, roads breached, cars were washed away and thousands of people marooned in one of the worst cases of floods to hit an Indian city in recent times.

(PTI)

THE ASIAN AGE

28 AUG 2000

Lesson from the rains

ANDHRA PRADESH has lately had a run of poor luck with nature. First, it was a harsh drought which devastated large parts of the state, and now a torrential downpour has pretty much submerged the Telengana region, including Hyderabad, or Cyberabad — the name raising futuristic visions of progress, thanks to the much-publicised efforts of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu. But the havoc wreaked by the rains has shown that much remains to be done at a more mundane level before the city can live up to its new name. Ironically, the flooding occurred soon after Mr Naidu convened a meeting of like-minded Chief Ministers to protest against the allegedly discriminatory treatment meted out to the so-called 'performing' states by the Eleventh Finance Commission. There is much to be said for his initiative, which has been endorsed by the Chief Ministers of six other states who also believe that they have not been treated fairly by the Commission.

But as the travails of Hyderabad in the aftermath of the rains have revealed, 'performance' can be evaluated at various levels. Undeniably, the computer-savvy Mr Naidu's efforts to provide Andhra Pradesh with a new modern image have won him many admirers. He is widely recognised to be different from the traditional run of Chief Ministers who are preoccupied with casteist and communal issues and are oblivious of a changing world. Instead, Mr Naidu's focus is on making Andhra Pradesh an investors' paradise. But if the rains have drawn attention to anything, it is to the stark fact that much more than the establishment of 'online' facilities is needed to make a state enter the 21st century.

In many respects, Hyderabad still lives in the 19th. Obviously, its drainage system can do with considerable improvement, although it is also true that few cities could have coped with the kind of downpour that it experienced. The way Delhi is flooded after only brief cloudbursts is an example of the condition of most of our cities. However, the woes of Hyderabad may have provided a timely lesson to which a man as hungry for success as Mr Naidu is will undoubtedly pay attention. Development is a many-sided affair. Urban distress is not Andhra Pradesh's only problem. Agricultural indebtedness driving farmers to suicide is another, and a more serious one. Perhaps the latest calamity will make the Chief Minister take a close hard look at such issues which may have been earlier partly overlooked.

THE HINDUSTANI TIMES

7 9 0 0 2 0 0

Torrential rains lash Andhra again, thousands evacuated

HYDERABAD: Heavy rains triggered by a fresh depression in the Bay of Bengal lashed parts of Andhra Pradesh on Sunday and thousands of people living in low-lying areas were evacuated to safer places as the river Godavari swelled.

The water level in the Godavari crossed the first danger mark of 43 feet at Bhadrachalam and was still rising, inundating low-lying villages in Khammam, Warangal, West Godavari, East Godavari, Kurnool and Mahboobnagar districts, official sources said here.

Torrential rains triggered by a deep depression in the Bay of Bengal had wreaked havoc in parts of the state during the past five days, leaving over 130 persons dead and causing heavy damage to crops, roads and tanks.

Chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu surveyed the flood-ravaged West Godavari district by a helicopter and inspected the affected areas in the state capital on Sunday morning.

Army helicopters were pressed into service to evacuate villagers from the marooned areas in Karimnagar and East and West Godavari districts. With water levels in Tungabhadra too rising, people were being evacuated from Kurnool and Mahboobnagar districts, official sources here said.

Kaleswaram in West Godavari and Eturunagaram in Warangal district received the

highest rainfall of 24 cm during the past 24 hours, a weather office spokesman said here.

In Warangal, two helicopters were deployed to rescue 20 villagers stranded on a hillock with the surrounding Lakshmipur village inundated by the Godavari's waters. Earlier, nine fishermen who ventured into a lake were reported missing, though three of them were later found clinging to a tree.

Relief and rehabilitation work was in full swing and medical teams had been deployed in the affected areas to check the outbreak of any epidemic, official sources said.

Mr Naidu told reporters that the situation was alarming. IAF helicopters and boats were rushed to Brahmanapalli village in Karimnagar district where about 600 people were marooned after water level rose up to six feet. Several villages in Manthani and Mahadevapur mandals in the same district were inundated by flood waters.

Mr Naidu said a fresh breach had developed in the 115-year-old Fox Sagar where irrigation and army experts were engaged in plugging the breach.

Replying to questions, he said the preliminary estimates of damage to the tune of Rs 776 crore pertained to only government departments and losses to private property were not included. Meanwhile, officials of Central team went round the flood-ravaged areas of the city and assessed the damages. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

28 AUG 2000

Godavari rises, massive evacuation on

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
HYDERABAD, AUG 28

THE Godavari river was in spate and rising rapidly all along its course in Andhra Pradesh today, posing a flood threat to five districts even as the state government was grappling with last week's havoc wrought by floods that had claimed 141 lives.

The water level at Godavari has already crossed 49.4 ft at the temple town of Bhadrachalam in Khammam district, as against the first warning level of 43 ft, and was likely to touch 63 ft by tomorrow, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu told the state assembly today.

Describing the flood situation as 'alarming and frightening', Naidu said people from low-lying areas in Karimnagar, Warangal, Adilabad, Khammam and Nizamabad were being evacuated and the district administration had been put on alert to take up rescue and relief operations.

An IAF helicopter had been sent to Karimnagar district to rescue 25 persons stranded at the confluence of Pranhita, Godavari and Manneru rivers while 25 others had been airlifted from a marooned area in Warangal district, he said. Following heavy rains in catchment areas of Pranhita in Maharashtra, Godavari level was rising rapidly all along its course from Nanded to Dowleshwaram in east Godavari districts, he said.

The Godavari basin districts had received a record 42 cm rain-

fall since Sunday triggering a flood threat to Karimnagar, Adilabad, Warangal, Khammam and Nizamabad districts, he said.

State Excise Minister T Nageshwara Rao has rushed to Bhadrachalam to oversee rescue operations.

The flood water entered 23 island villages in west Godavari district while the famous Kolleru lake in the district was in spate inundating one lakh hectares of paddy crop, Naidu said.

The police had rescued over 500 people stranded in submerged Brahmapalli village in Karimnagar district while eight others had been airlifted from Lakshmipuram village in Warangal district, he said.

Following Central Water Commission's flood warning, the collectors of Godavari basin districts had sounded an alert for evacuation of people from low-lying areas, the Chief Minister said.

Heavy rainfall has been forecast for Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, east Godavari, west Godavari, Karimnagar, Warangal, Khammam, Adilabad and Nizamabad districts in the next 48 hours.

Manthani town in Karimnagar district has been inundated while Fox Sagar tank on the city outskirts and Langar House tank in the city had suffered further breaches today.

In the last week's floods, 141 people had died and over 3,090 villages, spread over 13 districts, were affected with 298 villages being totally marooned, he said.

**ANDHRA
DELUGE**

INDIAN EXPRESS

29 AUG 2000

STATE-WIDE OPPOSITION BANDH TODAY

29/8

Two killed in A.P. police firing

By R.J. Rajendra Prasad

HYDERABAD, AUG. 28. Two persons were killed when police opened fire on Opposition demonstrators protesting against the power tariff hike in Hyderabad today, while the 40-odd Congress MLAs who had been on a fast for the past 11 days called it off saying that the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, did not respond to "Gandhian method of protest".

The two killed were identified as Balaswamy and Kiran Chandra. The Opposition gave a call for a State-wide bandh for Tuesday to protest against the police firing.

Activists of the Congress, CPI(M), CPI and several other Left parties gathered near the Jagjivan Ram statue in Basheerbagh here this morning, about one km from the State Assembly buildings.

The Left party activists, led by Mr. B.V. Raghavulu of CPI(M) and Mr. S. Sudhakara Reddy of CPI, defied prohibitory orders and tried to break the police cordon to go towards the Assembly. Police tried to push them back and resorted to firing intermittently for about 45 minutes. Mounted policemen attempted to disperse the crowd, but the demonstrators regrouped and pelted stones at policemen and set police vehicles on fire. Soon more policemen were brought in.

Mr. Chandrababu Naidu blamed the "extremist elements" for the violence and criticised

the Congress(I) for "allowing itself to be led into an alliance" with Marxist-Leninist groups. He said today's events showed that tomorrow's bandh would be violent.

'Firing undemocratic'

The Andhra Pradesh Congress(I) Committee president, Mr. M. Sathyanarayana Rao, described the police firing as "completely undemocratic", and against "genuine people's protest". Mr. Raghavulu said Mr. Chandrababu Naidu was "making a mistake, if he thinks of suppressing a people's movement through gun power". He said that from now on, the "people themselves will decide the form of agitation". Mr. Sudhakara Reddy (CPI) said that the "police response was brutal, instead of indulging in a lathicharge, teargas, water cannon, they straightaway resorted to firing on peaceful demonstrators, aiming at their heads instead of below the knee as required".

Yechuri coming

The CPI(M) politburo member, Mr. Sitaram Yechuri, is arriving here tomorrow to study the situation as a party observer.

Today's events were telecast by the SitiCable and Teja TV channels, which showed protesters running helter skelter and a constable taking aim to shoot at passersby on the flyover and another constable restraining him from doing so.

In Cuddapah, the Superintendent of Police

went to the SitiCable office and forced them to cancel the telecast. Congress(I) leaders staged a demonstration to protest this.

Just as the Congress(I) MLAs were calling off their fast, protestors set fire to an RTC bus in front of the old MLA Quarters. Police entered the quarters and lathicharged the Congress(I) supporters, in the process damaging about 30 cars, including those of the Leader of Opposition, Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy and MLAs, Ms. Galla Aruna and Ponnala Lakshmiah.

The 26 Congress MLAs who attended the Assembly disrupted the proceedings demanding a rollback of the power tariff hike, but Mr. Chandrababu Naidu, and the Home Minister, Mr. T. Devender Goud, replied to the debate amid the din.

Huge discharges into Godavari

Though there was no rain in the State today, a heavy rainfall of 40 cms in two days in Maharashtra has caused huge discharges into the Godavari. The water level at Bhadrachalam, which was 51.4 feet at 5 p.m. today, is expected to go up to 63 feet by Wednesday morning, and the discharge at Dowleswaram in Rajahmundry will be around 35 lakh cusecs, the level it reached in August, 1986, because of the confluence of Sabari downstream of Bhadrachalam. Officials however, assured that the situation was being closely monitored, and there would be no cause for panic.

Left blames Naidu: Page 13

THE HINDU

29 AUG 2000

Andhra Opp rally turns violent, 3 killed

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

HYDERABAD, Aug. 28. — Three people were killed and a constable suffered bullet injuries when police fired after the Opposition rally, demanding roll-back of the power tariff hike, turned violent here today.

At least 15 vehicles were set afire or damaged. About 180 people, including 54 policemen, were injured. The CPI-M state secretary, Mr BV Raghavulu, was also hurt. The "Chalo Assembly" rally was organised by the Congress and nine Left parties to bring to a climax the 90-day-old agitation against power tariffs.

A joint meeting of the Congress and Left parties today called off their fast-unto-death. They called a state bandh tomorrow, protesting against the police firing.

Processionists — led by the CPI state sec-

retary, Mr S Sudhakar Reddy — breached the first security cordon near Basheerbagh en route to the Assembly. Police lathi-charged when the rallyists made a forceful attempt to reach the next barbed-wire cordon.

Despite the lathi-charge, the processionists mounted pressure on the cordon. Some of them threw stones, injuring several policemen. In the melee an Andhra Pradesh Special Police constable, Quaisar Ali, was shot in the head. Police said somebody from the mob fired.

The police then fired, killing Sathyanarayana Murthy (30) of the CPI-ML (New Democracy) on the spot. Congress worker V Balaswamy and CITU activist Vishnu Vardhan Reddy later died of bullet wounds, adds UNI.

The Left rally, which was to join the Congress rally at Jagjivan Ram statue,

split into two groups after getting down the Basheerbagh flyover. One turned back to the Basheerbagh crossroads while the other, led by Mr Raghavulu, joined the Congress.

Police lathicharged to prevent them from getting across the cordons. Mr Raghavulu and the Congress MLA, Mr D Nagender, were injured.

Mr Nagender then went to the Assembly. Congress members went wild seeing him with a bandage round his head. They stormed the well of the House. The Speaker, Mrs K Pratibha Bharati, immediately adjourned the House.

This was the first time ever in the country where political parties wanted to storm the Assembly, Mr N Chandrababu Naidu said.

THE STATESMAN

29 AUG 2000

SC stays release of Veerappan men

OUR LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 29. — The Supreme Court today stayed release of 51 Tada accused and associates of Veerappan till Friday.

The brigand demanded their release in exchange for freeing filmstar Dr Rajkumar whom he abducted on 30 July.

The Supreme Court order came on the special leave petition filed by a retired DSP, Mr Abdul Karim, who challenged the Mysore special judge's 19 August order for release of the accused facing trial under Tada on charges of killing former SP Haribhaskar and sub-inspector Shakeel Ahmed in August 1992. The petitioner is the father of Shakeel Ahmed.

The Mysore special judge, Mr MS Rajendra Prasad, gave the order pursuant to an application by the Karnataka government. The judge granted bail to the 51 accused yesterday but since they could not arrange the sureties, they were not released.

The police had registered three special cases against Veerappan and his gang under

Sections 143, 147, 148, 341, 342, 120-B, 326, 307, 302, 396 and 149 of IPC, Sections 3, 4 and 5 of Indian Explosives Act, Sections 3 and 4 of Arms Act and sections 3, 4 and 5 of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (prevention) Act.

The Director-General and Inspector-General of Police, Karnataka, accorded sanction for prosecution on 12 April 1994.

The petitioner told the special judge, Mysore, that Karnataka had yielded to blackmail tactics and illegal demands of Veerappan after he abducted Dr Rajkumar. Therefore, the public prosecutor, Mr AK Joshi, moved an application seeking withdrawal of cases, the petitioner said.

The Advocate-General of Karnataka, Mr Jayaram, gave an undertaking before the Supreme Court today that the accused were not released.

The special leave petition was mentioned by Mr Amarendran Shran on behalf of Mr Abdul Karim in the morning and a three-judge Bench — comprising Mr Justice SP Bharucha, Mr Justice Syed Shah Mohammed Quadri and Mr Justice N Santosh Hegde — had

stayed the release till 3 p.m. today when the matter was again listed before the Bench.

Meanwhile, an interim application on behalf of some accused was filed by Mr KR Nagraj, an advocate.

At 3 p.m. the Solicitor-General, besides Mr Jayram, appeared in the court with Mr Ganpathi, standing counsel for Karnataka. Mr Sanjay Hegde, Karnataka state counsel, was also present. The court confirmed its earlier order staying the release of the detainees and the impugned order of the special Tada court till 1 September when the matter would be fully considered by the court.

The Advocate-General informed the court that a message had been flashed to the Karnataka DGP, stating that none of the accused was to be released till further orders of the court.

Proceedings for execution of bail orders for release of the 51 accused were withheld today by the Mysore special judge following the Supreme Court stay, PTI adds from Mysore.

THE STATESMAN

30 AUG 1994

Violence mars A.P. bandh

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, AUG. 29. The bandh called by the Opposition parties in Andhra Pradesh today was marred by incidents of violence, including stone-throwing. Called by the Congress (I) and nine Left parties, the bandh was in protest against the police firing and lathicharge on demonstrators during the "Chalo Assembly" rally on Monday.

Supporters of these parties detained trains at some places, organised a 'rasta roko' on the

Chennai-Calcutta National highway near Vijayawada and targeted state transport corporation buses in a few places. Youth Congress (I) workers hoisted a black flag atop the Nellore Collectorate.

With the television pictures of yesterday's violence still fresh in people's minds, political parties did not have to make much effort to enforce the bandh. Normal life was affected with schools, private offices and shops remaining closed and the state transport corporation withdrawing its local and long-distance services for the

day. The APCC (I) president, Mr. M. Satyanarayana Rao, the CPI (M) State Secretary, Mr. B. V. Raghavulu, and the CPI national secretary, Mr. Dasari Nagabhushan Rao, described the bandh as a success. They demanded an inquiry by a sitting High Court Judge into the police brutality on demonstrators on Monday. Police had made large-scale preventive arrests.

In Nellore, political activists damaged the furniture inside the office of a Telugu daily and detained the Coromandel and Pinakini Express trains. An office of AP Transco was burnt at Hindupur damaging property worth Rs. 5 lakhs.

Reports of stone-throwing on state transport corporation buses in Bodhan and Kamareddy in Nizamabad district, detention of the Coromandel Express at Vijayawada and obstruction of traffic on National Highway No. 5 from 10 am to 4 pm were also received. The CPI (M) took out a rally in Visakhapatnam where it paraded its women activists injured in Monday's violence. The APSRTC also paraded in the capital all the buses damaged in stone-pelting.

According to the Director General of Police, 40 buses were damaged in different parts of the State, including 34 in Hyderabad, while trains were stopped in 13 districts. Agitators demanding damaged a petrol station at Ongole and a car belonging to the Joint Collector in Khammam.

Firing condemned: Page 13

THE HINDU

30 AUG 2000

'Stay not related to Rajkumar release'

By Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE, AUG. 29. The Karnataka Chief Minister, Mr. S. M. Krishna, today said that the Advocate-General, Mr. A. N. Jayaram, would be asked to defend the Government's action in the Supreme Court with regard to the special leave petition (SLP) filed by Mr. Abdul Kareem seeking a stay on the bail of the 51 TADA detenus, whose release the brigand, Veerappan, had demanded. Mr. Kareem is the father of the police officer, Shakeel Ahmed, killed by the brigand in 1992.

The Supreme Court, which heard the SLP today, posted the matter to September 1 and asked the Karnataka Government to file counter objections, if any.

The Government would do so, but this would not delay the process of getting Mr. Rajkumar released from Veerappan, who had been keeping him and three others hostage since July 31. "He (Veerappan) is concerned about

our intentions and we are clear in them." The adjournment of the hearing and the early release of Mr. Rajkumar were unrelated, he said.

Asked whether he would explain this stand through All India Radio, which Veerappan is supposed to be listening to, Mr. Krishna said, "we need to explain our stand to the Supreme Court and not to Veerappan."

To a question whether his Government would persuade Mr. Kareem to withdraw the SLP, the Chief Minister said "every citizen has the right to pursue his fundamental right and the State Government recognises that."

To another question on the Government's hastiness in dropping charges against the TADA detenus without setting up a review committee, the Chief Minister said he could not answer it as the matter was "sub-judice".

THE HINDU

11 AUG 2000

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ANDHRA'S POWER PLAY

20/8

THERE IS SOMETHING dreadfully amiss about a society in which political protests periodically result in police firing and death. The killing of two persons who were shot down in a melee during a demonstration against the power tariff hike in Hyderabad deserves forthright condemnation. It is true that a section of the demonstrators, who defied prohibitory orders, turned unforgivably violent, setting police vehicles on fire and raining stones on policemen. But this does not justify opening fire on the crowd in the manner in which the Andhra Pradesh police did. The bloody climax to the Opposition-led 'Chalo Assembly' rally is another painful reminder about how ill-equipped and ill-prepared the country's police are in managing angry crowds and irate demonstrators. In this age of rubber bullets, water cannon and new techniques of crowd control, it is something of a disgrace that the response of the Indian police is often marked by inexcusable excess and unthinking haste. To labour the obvious, in any democracy, death is no solution for the dispersal of disorderly demonstrations.

Mr. Chandrababu Naidu's Government would do well to give in to the Opposition's demand that a judicial inquiry be conducted into the whole incident. To refuse to do so would be patently unjust; at a more pragmatic level, failing to inquire into what transpired would harden the position of the Congress(I)-led Opposition, which has conducted a sustained and vociferous campaign against the power tariff hike for three months now. On the other side, in these surcharged times, the Opposition would do well to exercise a certain measure of self-restraint. The Opposition may believe that raising a hue and cry over an unpopular power tariff hike may yield political capital, but it would be unwise to stretch the already-protracted agitation beyond a point.

The hike, after all, has taken place against a background of power sector reform, a process that may be painful but is necessary and, arguably, inevitable. The evidence that a good part of the violence during the demonstration was orchestrated by Left-extremist elements is extremely disturbing. Predictably, Mr. Naidu's Government has tried to highlight this point when trying to explain the violence which broke out during the demonstration. Although the full truth about the involvement of those belonging to fringe Leftist groups can be known only after a proper inquiry, the Opposition parties must be careful in ensuring that the protests are not exploited by other elements for their own ends.

Mr. Naidu has consistently refused to cave in to the Opposition's demand that the hike in electricity charges be rolled back arguing, among other things, that he has won a mandate from the people to reform the power sector. Although the rise in the tariff is steep, it has been structured in a manner to tax the middle class or the rich consumer and spare those who consume only small amounts of electricity. (Mr. Naidu's power sector reform is painted with his own touches of populism). In post-reform Andhra Pradesh, a farmer pays less than 20 paise per unit — a fraction of the cost of production. In a scenario where the power sector continues to be heavily subsidised, it is difficult to see the merit in a protracted agitation against tariff hikes. The Congress(I) and the Left parties should take their grievances to the State Electricity Regulation Commission (SERC), the body which determined the parameters of the recent tariff hike, rather than to the streets. If it is populism that has driven the present agitation, then the Congress(I) at least — which lost the Andhra Pradesh Assembly election despite promising to restore free power to farmers — ought to have learnt that it doesn't always pay.

THE HINDU

30 AUG 2000

Hyderabad floods: A man-made disaster

Ashok Das
Hyderabad, August 30

FOUR HUNDRED years ago, when Asaf Jahi rulers decided to set up their permanent capital at Bhagyanagar, which later became Hyderabad, they selected the place for its elevation.

The devastating floods in 1908 that killed 30,000 residents made the Nizams build a chain of dams and reservoirs to impound the water and use it to meet the city's need for drinking water. All these measures ensured that Hyderabad would not have floods for the next 62 years.

The recent floods, the worst since 1908, which devastated Cyberabad is a reminder of human greed and gross mismanagement of water bodies. The floods were essentially a man made disaster, waiting to happen.

"Earlier rulers had created a chain of lakes, reservoirs and tanks with surplus water flowing from one to the other without flooding the landscape. However, most of the tanks and lakes have vanished with people encroaching into the tank beds," says D.Narasimha Reddy of the Centre for Resource

Education, an environmental NGO.

According to him there were as many as 530 lakes and reservoirs around the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, which besides stopping run off flood waters, provided water for drinking and irrigation. Hardly 100 water bodies now remain.

Some of the well known water bodies like Masabtank, Talabkatta, Yousufguda Lake, Saroornagar Lake, Miralam tank, Ramnathpur Lake, Safilguda Lake, Ramanthapur Lake, Malkajiri Lake have vanished without trace. In their place stand populous localities and multi-storied concrete structures.

Prof. K. Purushottam Reddy, noted environmentalist says that environmental groups have been highlighting the crisis-in-the-making from time to time.

It is only now the government woke up to the crisis because of the large-scale devastation caused by floods. Prof. Reddy says all political parties with their vote bank politics have contributed to colonies being made on lakebeds as well as inlets and outlets of rivers and streams.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

31 AUG 2000

Sadist Bihar minister removed

HT Correspondent
Patna, July 10

HPI 11/7

BIHAR'S MINISTER of State for Cooperation Lalit Yadav, accused of torturing a Dalit truck driver and cleaner, was today sacked by Chief Minister Rabri Devi, who also ordered his arrest.

Making a detailed statement in the Assembly on the incident on behalf of the government, Water Resources Minister Jagdanand Singh said the Chief Minister took immediate action after a TV channel reported that the Minister had confined truck driver Dinanath Baitha and helper Karu Ram inside his official residence and subjected them to torture.

He said the Chief Minister had recommended immediate dismissal of the Minister to the Governor last night itself following submission of a report by top officials. The Governor accepted the recommendation today and dismissed the Minister.

Lalit Yadav has also been expelled from the primary membership of the party by RJD presi-



dent Laloo Yadav.

The Water Resources Minister said a case had been registered by the Secretariat police station on

Saturday under various sections, including 341, 344, 333, 506, 109 and 504 of the Indian Penal Code, and relevant sections of the SC/ST Atrocities Prevention Act.

Singh said the investigation was being supervised by a DIG-rank officer and Patna SSP Sunil Kumar.

Clarifying that the truck driver had not been taken into custody, Singh said he was being sent to his native village under security cover to participate in his daughter's marriage on July 12.

Singh said a medical report on the condition of the driver had confirmed that the victim's nails were pulled out some 10 days ago. The security guards of Lalit Yadav would also face action for their failure to inform the authorities

about the incident.

Mr. Singh said according to the FIR, the driver and the cleaner consumed liquor near a railway line petrol pump at Hajipur while returning from a trip and got inebriated. They later realised that the truck had been stolen.

Both of them were taken to Lalit Yadav's residence, tortured and left to starve in the presence of the Minister. They were also forced to drink urine.

Earlier, Opposition members created a furore in the Assembly and demanded a statement from the government on the incident. Raising the matter during zero hour, leader of the Opposition Sushil Kumar Modi said the government was taking no action to arrest the minister and the other accused in the case. He said the government should immediately release the driver as his daughter was getting married.

Speaker Sadanand Singh also expressed concern over the incident and asked the government to give a statement in the matter by evening.

Bihar Minister gets the sack

By K. Balchand

PATNA, JULY 10. The Bihar Minister of State for Cooperation, Mr. Lalit Kumar Yadav, has been dismissed from the Council of Ministers and expelled from the ruling Rashtriya Janata Dal for his alleged complicity in the wrongful confinement and torture of two Dalits.

As demanded by the Opposition, the Government issued a statement later in the day and admitted that there was a prima facie case against the dismissed Minister for illegally detaining Mr. Deenanath Baitha, a truck driver and Mr. Karu Ram, cleaner, and subjecting them to third-degree torture at his official residence for about one month.

Making the statement, the Water Resources Minister, Mr. Jagdanand Singh, said cases had been filed under the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe Atrocities (Prevention) Act, against Mr. Yadav, his cousin, Mr. Surendra Yadav, and four others on the basis of the inquiry report, which the Chief Minister had called for.

Acknowledging that the Government had come to know of the case through a TV channel report, Mr. Jagdanand Singh said it was on June 6 that Mr. Baitha, driving a truck loaded with stone chips from Sasaram to Dhori in Muzaffarpur district, stopped at Hajipur for the night.

Accompanied by his helper, Mr. Karu Ram, Mr. Baitha had on his way picked up Deenanath Paswan, another truck driver and his driving teacher. All the three consumed liquor and Mr. Baitha and Mr. Ram woke up to find the truck missing. The driver informed the truck owner, Mr. Surendra Yadav, about the incident on June 9. Mr. Surendra Yadav brought them to the official residence of Mr. Lalit Yadav and employed his "own methods" to elicit the "truth."

The Minister said Mr. Lalit Yadav was present when Mr. Surendra Yadav and his accomplices, including Pappu and Vijay, tied Mr. Baitha up and thrashed him mercilessly the first time. Mr. Surendra Yadav and his men then urinated in the driver's mouth, ripped off his toenails, starved him for days and threatened him.

Driver compensated: Page 10

THE HINDU

11 JUL 2000

NDA calls for Rabri dismissal, Cong to continue support

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA, June 10. — The NDA today submitted a memorandum to the Governor seeking removal of Mrs Rabri Devi as chief minister in view of the charges framed against her and Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav by a CBI designated court in a corruption case.

The RJD government however is under no immediate threat with the Congress deciding to continue its support. "There is no question of withdrawing support to the government at this stage", the BPCC president, Mr Chandan Bagchi, said. The party earlier said it would reconsider its support to the RJD government if the court framed charges against the chief minister.

"The role of the Governor itself is under clouds of suspicion. He is playing into the hands of the NDA. Mr Pandey sanctioned the prosecution of the chief minister on the day of her taking oath at the behest of the NDA leaders," Mr Bagchi said.

The Raj Bhavan, however, denied the charge. "The CBI neither prayed for the sanction of prosecution against the chief minister nor the Governor gave the same", a release issued by the secretary to the Governor

PROSECUTION NOD

PATNA, June 10. — The Bihar Governor today accorded sanction to the CBI to prosecute a former state minister in connection with Rs 300 crore bitumen scam case. The former road construction minister, Mr Illiyas Hussain, is already in judicial custody in connection with the case (9A/97). — SNS

clarified.

Asked about the Congress' previous stand that it would reconsider its support to the government if the the court framed charges against Mrs Rabri Devi, Mr Bagchi told The Statesman: "We are in the process of procuring the papers to examine the circumstances in which the court framed charges against Mrs Rabri Devi. The high command will take a decision after legal experts give their opinion on the papers."

The volte-face is understandable. Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav has "obliged" the Congress high command by inducting Mr Madhava Rao Scindia, Mrs Mohishina Kidwai and Mr Madhav Singh Solanki into the "Super Cabinet" he has constituted to "supervise" function-

ing of the Bihar Government. Mr Yadav is the convenor of this newly constituted body.

Members of this "Super Cabinet" enjoy the facilities reserved for Central ministers. The 23 Congress MLAs too are enjoying the fruits of power. Twenty two of its legislators are the members of Mrs Rabri Devi's mammoth council of minister while the Mr Sadanand Singh is Speaker of the House. "The Congress has developed a vested interest in keeping the corrupt Rabri Government alive. How do you expect the Congress to withdraw its support?", leader of the Opposition, Mr Sushil Kumar Modi said.

The NDA delegation, which included Mr Modi and the Samata Party spokesman, Mr PK Sinha, met the Governor and urged him to ask the chief minister to resign. Their memorandum said: "Dismiss Mrs Rabri Devi if she refuses to resign from her post."

"It is simply not possible for a court of law to conduct the trial of a chief minister in office. There is no way how Mrs Rabri Devi should be allowed to continue," Mr Modi later told reporters. The RJD spokesman, Mr Shakeel Ahmad Khan, ruled out Mrs Rabri Devi resigning her post.

THE STATESMAN

11 JUN 200

PM seeks massacre details

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 17. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, is reported to have sought through "central sources" details about the latest massacre in Bihar which has resulted in 34 brutal deaths. So far, only the central agencies' assessment has been sought, and the Centre would be wary, at this stage, to be seen as taking more than a "correct" interest.

However, it is realised that the BJP's partners in the National Democratic Alliance would react strongly to the massacre, and there would be a predictable call for "central action" against a State Government which has failed to stop the spate of killings and counter-killings.

Demands have already been voiced for imposition of Presi-

dent's rule. The Union Government, nonetheless, is not likely to allow itself to be stampeded into any hasty action.

No one has forgotten the embarrassment caused by the earlier attempts by an impetuous Home Minister to bring Bihar under President's rule.

The Rabri Devi Government has come to power after a fresh election, and in any case the Government has no majority in the Rajya Sabha to make the President's rule stick. A case, therefore, would have to be made for invocation of Article 356.

Only three weeks ago, the Union Home Ministry "advised" the Government of Bihar "to take remedial steps for prevention of impending clashes, between Senas on the one hand and the left-extremists groups on the other, in

sensitive districts of central Bihar." On May 25, the Home Ministry voiced its "concern" over killings in Patna, Gaya, Jehanabad, Bhojpur and Aurangabad.

Though the Union Government had not specifically mentioned Article 355, the warning was seen as a soft invocation of that constitutional provision which enjoins the Centre to "ensure that the Government of every State is carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution."

The inclination, for now, is to let the gravity of the situation sink; the obvious failure of the Rabri Devi government to deal firmly with the caste senas would put the onus on the RJD's supporting parties.

Only then would it be possible to think in terms of Article 356.

THE HINDU

18 JUN 2000

Left parties call Bihar bandh on Wednesday

Laloo, BJP trade carnage charges

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE & AGENCIES

PATNA, June 18. — The customary noises of condolence having been made, political parties today quickly shifted gear to blame one another for the Miapur massacre.

Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav held the 'RSS-BJP-sponsored' Ranvir Sena responsible for the carnage and demanded that the Prime Minister institute an inquiry into the Sangh parivar's 'involvement'. He even described the landlords' private army as an extension of the Bajrang Dal.

A three-member fact-finding team of the BJP visited the carnage spot and said the situation in Bihar was beyond control. Blaming Mr Laloo Yadav, state BJP president Mr Nandkishore Yadav said the caste divide created by the RJD leader was the root of the serial massacres in central Bihar. He demanded the immediate dismissal of the Rabri Devi government by the Governor to pave way for an 'all-party government'.

Dismissing the RJD chief's charge that the NDA was trying to destabilise the state government, he said this was aimed at diverting attention from the ruling couple's disproportionate assets case.

Meanwhile, 11 persons have been arrested over the carnage, the IG said. Combing operation is on to nab the killers. Twelve policemen have been suspended for negligence of duty.

The last rites of the massacre victims were performed today in the presence of senior administrative officers. The post-mortem of bodies were done at local hospital before they were consigned to flames. The relatives handed over the bodies only after the arrival of Mr Laloo Yadav and Mrs Rabri Devi.

Left parties, including the CPI, CPI-ML (Liberation), and Forward Bloc have called a 12-

GOVERNOR IN ACTION

PATNA, June 18. — Bihar Governor Mr VC Pande today met state chief secretary and home commissioner, and sought a report on the recent massacres.

The Governor's action has sparked off speculations in political circles here. Some senior bureaucrats believe Mr Pande is in the process of apprising the Centre of the state government's 'ineffectiveness' in dealing with the worsening law and order.

In Delhi, the Prime Minister also reviewed the situation. — SNS

hour Bihar bandh on Wednesday. The bandh called by the CPI-ML today evoked mixed response as shops remained closed.

Mr Laloo Yadav has said the government is ready to institute a special court to conduct the trial of the massacre. He said the administration was in the process of creating 20 task force units to deal with

extremism and caste wa in Bihar.

The RJD chief demanded more companies of central paramilitary forces and said the government had earlier demanded 85 companies in the wake of the massacres in Nawada district. "But the Centre provided only 20."

Samata Party leader and Union Agriculture Minister Mr Nitish Kumar said such massacres wouldn't stop till Mrs Rabri Devi is ousted. He too, echoed the demands for President's Rule and an all party government.

Mr Yadav hit back saying the National Democratic Alliance was itself opposed to the policy of collective initiatives, pointing out that none of the NDA constituents participated in the all-party meeting that the Chief Minister convened last month over the law and order situation.

The BJP is also turning the heat on the Congress to distance itself from the RJD. Mr Nandkishore Yadav said the Congress was losing credibility with its continued support to a blood-stained regime.

The CPI-M took a different stand as it said the problem lay in the land question, which must be addressed in all earnestness. The party demanded setting up of special courts to try cases of caste violence, and opposed the demand for President's Rule as it was "not the answer".

The Politburo condemned

■ See BIHAR: page 8

BIHAR:

(Continued from page 1)

the Prime Minister's statement that his government was not in a position to impose central rule in Bihar as it didn't have a majority in Rajya Sabha, as "partisan and irresponsible". He said Mr AB Vajpayee had "signalled his willingness to dismiss the government" and "exposed an authoritarian outlook".

Mr Laloo Yadav also charged that Mr Vajpayee was trying to instigate the Congress in a bid to destabilise an elected government. He said the massacres were not a law and order problem, but effects of prolonged socio-economic ills.

The state government has sounded red alert in Aurangabad, Nawada, Gaya, Jehanabad, Bhojpur and parts of Patna. The Naxalite-dominated Aurangabad, Jehanabad and Gaya have been tense following the Miapur carnage.

Police pickets have been reportedly deployed at Sakla village after tension flared up between the Ranvir Sena and the CPI-ML over the payment of minimum wages to agricultural labourers.

THE STATESMAN

19 JUN 2000

Law and order situation in Bihar pretty bad: Advani

Paris
19 JUNE

UNION HOME minister L.K. Advani on Monday termed the law and order situation in Bihar as "pretty bad" but ruled out the possibility of imposing President's Rule in the state under the present circumstances.

Reacting to the recent massacre of 34 people in Bihar, Mr Advani, who is here on a two-day visit, termed it an "ugly incident" and said "on the whole the law and order situation in Bihar has been pretty bad."

However, the home minister said the Constitution imposes a constraint by which the central government can take over administration of Bihar only when both Houses of Parliament support the decision.

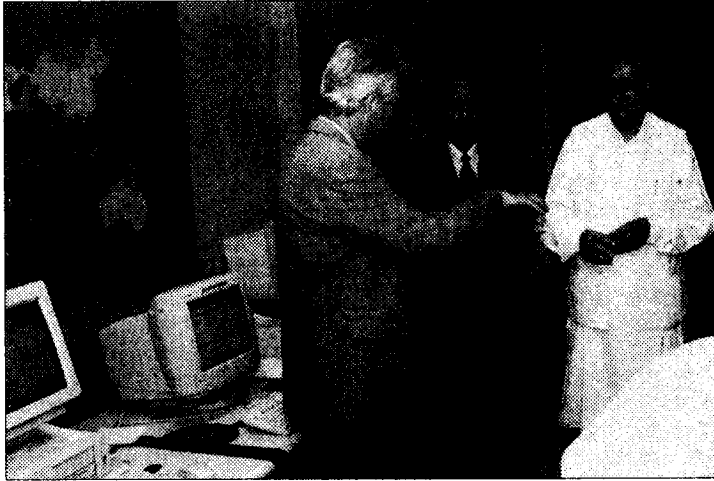
"The composition of the Houses is of a nature that the Congress has to make up their mind. We can make a move only when we are assured of support by the Opposition parties," Mr Advani told reporters here.

The senior BJP leader also said that the Constitution does not empower the central government to take over a state only because there was a problem of law and order. "There has to be a breakdown in constitutional machinery," for the Centre's intervention, he remarked.

But the home minister stated that the Centre has promised to render all kinds of assistance to the Bihar government, including sending more paramilitary forces, to tackle the situation in the state.

Highlighting on the recent developments in Jammu and Kashmir, Mr Advani said a new dimension has been added in the recent months by establishing contacts with various militant groups.

The militant groups have been told that "we are willing to discuss with you any of your grievances within the four corners of the Indian Constitution," the home minister said. — PTI



Home minister L.K. Advani listens to explanations from an Interpol official in Lyon on Monday AP

French help sought to counter terrorism

Paris
19 JUNE

INDIA AND France will discuss ways and means to tackle international terrorism and New Delhi has sought Paris' support to bring a comprehensive global convention to counter the menace, Union home minister L.K. Advani said here on Monday.

"The biggest threat to India's internal security has been Pakistan's proxy war in which the principle ingredients have been infiltration, subversion and terrorism," Mr Advani, who is here on a two-day visit, told reporters.

"While the Indian government must exert (pressure) to see that these threats are contained, there is a need to build a strong world opinion against international terrorism" and in this context, the home minister said, India will hold discussions with France and Britain.

Mr Advani, who is on a three-nation visit, arrived here on Sunday from Israel after completing a four-day visit to that country. In Paris, he will hold discussions with his French counterpart Jean Pierre Chevenement before proceeding to the Interpol headquarters in the southern French city of Lyon later in the day.

Mr Advani said going by the outcome of earlier interactions with the French officials, he was confident of getting Paris' support for the India-sponsored convention on international terrorism at the UN.

Terming the present status of Indo-French relations as "very good," he said: "throughout a period where we did seek international support and the manner in which France has endorsed our stand on so many issues is a matter of great satisfaction." Mr Advani, however, did not go into details on the cooperation which New Delhi is expecting from Paris to counter "cross-border terrorism." — PTI

20 JUN 2000

INSTANCES of an industrialist weeping before the Supreme Court to seek its protection from the "don" of Siwan, Md Shahabuddin, or the raging caste war unleashed by two criminal gangs in Nawada district which left 20 dead on 11 June, or the more recent massacre of 34 men, women and children by the outlawed Ranvir Sena no longer surprise the people of Bihar. Such incidents have become routine affair in this benighted state. They are used to it now.

In fact, the ganglords — they come in the garb of *netas*, most of them being members of Parliament or legislators — have divided most of the state between themselves and play lord and master over their respective areas of influence. Undisputed dictators of what can be aptly referred to as their "fiefdoms".

The state is divided into three parts: north, central, and south Bihar. The boundary of north Bihar begins from Gopalganj (home of Laloo Prasad Yadav) and Siwan. If chief minister Rabri Devi's brother Sadhu Yadav calls the shots in Gopalganj, Rashtriya Janata Dal MP Md Shahabuddin lords it over Siwan.

And his is a name to inspire terror. An underworld operator of yesteryear, Shahabuddin switched over to politics in 1990, winning the Zeeradei assembly seat (home of India's first President, Rajendra Prasad) as an independent candidate. Taking into account his clout in the constituency, Laloo Prasad Yadav brought Shahabuddin into his party in 1995. *Vidhayak ji*, as he is referred to in Siwan even before his election as an MP, hasn't looked back since. He won the Zeeradei seat on the RJD ticket in 1995, was elected to the Lok Sabha the following year and maintained his winning spree in the 1998 and 1999 Lok Sabha polls on the RJD ticket.

Today he's the king of Siwan. Few venture to speak against him. So palpable is the terror. No rival political party even dares to put up its handbills and posters in Siwan during the elections. The life-sized statues and posters of Shahabuddin festoon the walls and buildings in the town and those opposed to his ideals would think twice before whispering into your ears, let alone indulging in open criticism of him. For Shahabuddin does not tolerate dissenters.

Chandra Shekhar, a former president of the Jawaharlal Nehru Students' Union and CPI-ML (Liberation) leader, decided to take up the cudgels against the "don" and was promptly shot dead in broad day light, in full view of people in the heart of Siwan. Ashok Singhal, a young superintendent of police, fired by enthusiasm to take on *Vidhayak ji*, raided his house and seized firearms from the MP's henchmen. Shahabuddin chased the policeman into a blind alley and fired at him. The police

5/9
M/b

In the absence of mainstream political parties showing the least inclination to shun the company of underworld operators, Bihar seems destined for destruction, writes
NALIN VERMA

Ganglords' paradise

P-8
Bihar

officer literally fled for his life. Shahabuddin's henchmen, who move around openly with sophisticated weapons, allegedly murdered a senior advocate of Siwan court recently because he had accepted some briefs against the don. The ministers of the area, the administrative and the police officers of Siwan, literally crawl before him. His word is law.

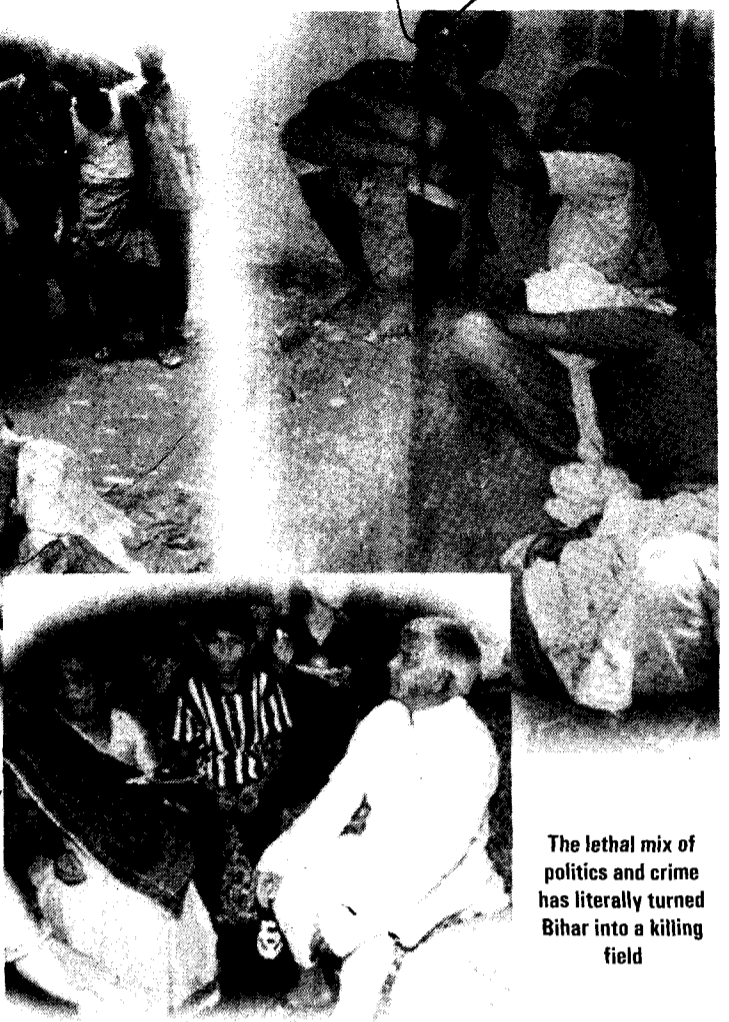
Cross Siwan to enter Maharajganj and Chapra to find the "fiefdom" of Prabhunath Singh, Samata Party MP, and Dhumal Singh, independent legislator from Baniapur. Prabhunath Singh is up for more than 20 cases of murder, including that of RJD legislator Ashok Singh. Enter Maharajganj and you'll hear the stories doing the rounds that Prabhunath Singh got even Central reserve Police Force jawans on duty at the polling stations in the last Lok Sabha polls to surrender their arms and looted the booths. And Dhumal Singh is an accused in 174 cases of murder. The people and administration saw Dhumal campaigning with hundreds of gun-wielding henchmen.

The "fiefdoms" of independent legislator Munna Shukla, and Janata Dal(U) legislator Rama Singh begin from where the boundary of Chapra district ends. Munna Shukla runs a "kingdom" which spreads from Vaishali-Lalganj towns in Vaishali district to Muzaffarpur. Though he is behind bars in connection with the murder of Bihar min-

ister Brijbihari Singh — he faces more than 25 cases of murder and dacoity — people say he is bent on avenging the killing of his brothers, Chotan Shukla and Bhutkun Shukla, in a gang war. And only Munna Shukla can get the contracts for road construction and other development work in the Vaishali region. Rama Singh, who faces more than 30 cases of murder and kidnapping, lords it over the Adapur and Hajipur regions of Vaishali.

Cross Vaishali and Muzaffarpur district and you enter Champaran, now divided into east and west districts. Dreaded ganglord Rajan Tiwary, a Samata Party legislator, holds sway over the region, the same area from where Mahatma Gandhi launched his Champaran *satyagraha* against the British. Rajan Tiwary is also behind bars in connection with the murder of minister Brijbihari Prasad. He was earlier associated with the dreaded underworld operator of Uttar Pradesh, Shriprakash Shukla. After Shriprakash was killed in an encounter with the police, Tiwary switched over to politics and made Brahmin-dominated Govindganj constituency in East Champaran his home.

Known as a "sharp shooter" in underworld circles, Tiwary was elected to the Bihar assembly in the last polls. Champaran is now known for its "flourishing kidnapping industry". More than 200



The lethal mix of politics and crime has literally turned Bihar into a killing field

traders and farmers have been abducted in the 10-year Laloo-Rabri regime.

The likes of Pappu Yadav — a member of Parliament who is behind bars in connection with the murder of Marxist veteran Ajit Sarkar and goon-turned-*netas* Anand Mohan — call the shots in the Purnea and Katihar regions which are known as "Seemanchal" (where the boundary of the state ends).

Central Bihar has its own share of ganglords. If Sunil Pandey, a Ranvir Sena (militia of upper caste Bhumihar landlords) man turned Samata Party legislator, lords it over Bhojpur district, RJD legislator from Belaganj, Surendra Yadav, rules the roost in Jehanabad and Gaya districts. Both are accused in numerous cases of murders, dacoity and road hold-ups.

Central Bihar's Nawada district has been transformed into killing fields because of a caste war unleashed by two criminal gangs — one led by Vinod Yadav, brother of the RJD minister Rajballabh Yadav and the other by Akhilesh Singh, ganglord of Bhumihar criminals in Nawada. The battle of supremacy between the two has left a bloody trail.

The Vinod Yadav gang, allegedly in connivance with local deputy superintendent of police PK Mandal, mowed down 12 Bhumihars at Apsad in Nawada on 11 June. And then followed the Ranvir Sena massacre of 34 men, women and children in remote Upahara village of Aurangabad district on the night of 17 June.

These criminal gangs usually keep the battle alive to expand

the territories under their influence. And most of their leaders are now legislators and members of Parliament and have immense clout, particularly among their own castes — virtual Robin Hoods. The recurring failure of the administration and the police to ensure justice has paved the way for the emergence of these ganglords as a "substitute" system.

The lethal mix of politics and crime has literally turned Bihar into a paradise for these ganglords. By virtue of their political tag, they enjoy sizeable influence over the administrative and development machinery in their respective areas. They get officers of their choice posted to their areas of influence, indulge in extortion of traders and corner contract work to make their fortunes.

Laloo Prasad Yadav promoted and accorded political status to Yadav and Muslim criminals like Dularchand Yadav, Surendra Yadav and Md Shahabuddin. The NDA in a bid to counter the might of Laloo Yadav, promoted upper caste criminals — the likes of Rajan Tiwary, Rama Singh and Prabhunath Singh — in its effort to break the political might of Laloo Yadav by hook or by crook.

And so it seems that Bihar is destined to be ruled by ganglords in the absence of any mainstream political party showing the inclination to shun the company of underworld operators. Crime and politics have become synonymous in Bihar.

(The author is The Statesman's Patna-based correspondent.)

Legitimising gun culture in Bihar

By V.Krishna Ananth

The Mianpur massacre by the outlawed gang of mercenaries, Ranvir Sena, has provoked the political dispensation of Patna to chalk out an action plan. Unlike in the past, the Chief Minister, Ms. Rabri Devi, with the able assistance of her party chief, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, decided to hold consultations among leaders of the ruling combine rather than stopping with mere visits to the killing fields and announcing solatium to the kin of the victims.

An occasion was thus created for the first ever meeting of the "coordination committee" of the ruling combine. That it took such a long time and so many deaths before the committee could hold its first meeting indicates that all talk of high principles and issue-based unity that were being held out as the basis of the post-poll arrangement between the RJD and the Congress(I) was nothing more than rhetoric. The outcome of the "consultations" held by the Chief Minister cannot but shock those familiar with the ground realities in Bihar. Take, for instance, the proposal formalised by the coordination committee — to leave the District Magistrates and police officials of equivalent rank to "select" groups of young

NEWS ANALYSIS

men and "train them to handle firearms" so that they could act as "protection groups" against violent gangs, whether they belong to naxalite outfits or private armies of feudal social groups. The committee is also reported to have recommended that the Government issue licences to those among the poor willing to own guns.

Given that Bihar has had a long tradition of guns available in plenty — whether sophisticated or country-made, and with gang-lords rather than personnel belonging to the State machinery controlling most parts of the civil society, such proposals held out by the RJD chief can only lead the State into an abyss.

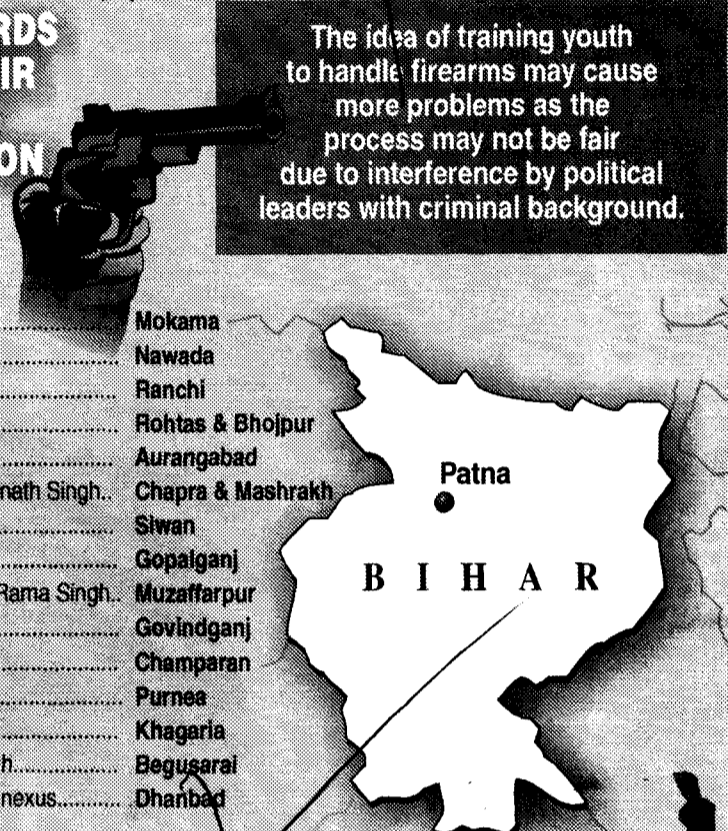
Added to this, several such gang-lords are now honourable members of the Legislative Assembly. At least 20 MLAs are in various jails in the State facing charges of murder, kidnapping and extortion. And being in jail does not stop them from carrying on with their activities through their men outside. For instance, Mr. Surajbhan Singh, now representing Mokammah Assembly constituency, could ensure during the last election that his rival, Mr. Dilip Singh, did not enter parts of the constituency during the campaign.

The same holds good in case of at least a dozen other MLAs, prominent among them being Mr. Rama Singh, Mr. Rajan Tiwari, Mo-

HD-15 22/6

GANGLORDS AND THEIR AREA OF OPERATION

Suraj Bhan.....	Mokama
Akhilesh Singh.....	Nawada
Abhay Singh.....	Ranchi
Sunil Pandey.....	Rohtas & Bhojpur
Ranvir Sena.....	Aurangabad
Dhumal & Prabhunath Singh..	Chapra & Mashrakh
Md. Shahabuddin.....	Siwan
Sadhu Yadav.....	Gopalganj
Munna Shukla & Rama Singh..	Muzaffarpur
Rajan Tiwari.....	Govindganj
Bhangar Yadav.....	Champanan
Pappu Yadav.....	Purnea
Ranbir Yadav.....	Khagaria
Ram Lakhan Singh.....	Begusarai
Contractor-Police nexus.....	Dhanbad



The idea of training youth to handle firearms may cause more problems as the process may not be fair due to interference by political leaders with criminal background.

Graphic by VARGHESE KALLADA

ammed Taslimuddin (who had to quit the Union Cabinet in 1996 after it was found that he was facing criminal charges); and they belong to the ruling combine as well as the Opposition NDA.

While it would not be right to condemn all these important men, at least till the courts hold them guilty, one cannot gloss over the problems that are bound to come up in the context of the proposals. In the first place, there is the danger of such an institutional arrangement falling into the hands of these very gang-lords; for there is no way the officers in the police and other arms of the administration can deny a role to the "elected" representatives while "selecting" youth for imparting arms training.

It may be a different story that several young men in Bihar hardly need any such training; for manufacture of arms and use of country-made weapons are a way of life in several parts of the State. The proposal to arm the local youth assumes dangerous proportions for a different reason too. Those in the civil administration, at least large sections among them,

are not free from caste and other such prejudices that have been the root cause of all the violence in the State. The alleged involvement of an officer of DSP rank in the killing of 14 members of a family in Nawada district, a couple of weeks ago, is illustrative.

Given that most of the killings — in Arwal, Lakshmanpur Bathe, Philhaur and such other places by the Ranvir Sena or the massacre in Senari a year ago by the MCC — were essentially a fallout of land-related disputes, the only way to restore civility is to address the land-owning patterns. It is hence the responsibility of the State to earnestly take up meaningful land reforms, a duty enjoined on those in power by the Constitution.

Such measures as arming the local youth will only lead to further legitimisation of the war-lords, and many of them will find in the Government's proposal a means to convert their followers into "protection groups". The immediate fallout of this will only be an intensification of the caste war, a feature that is even otherwise turning Bihar into killing fields.

Tell Rabri to resign, NDA urges Governor

Alliance gives call for Bihar bandh on April 7

HT Correspondent
Patna, April 4

THE NDA leaders today urged Governor Vinod Chandra Pande to press for the resignation of Chief Minister Rabri Devi in the wake of the charge sheet filed against her in the DA case by the CBI and gave a call for Bihar bandh on April 7.

The leaders even called upon the Governor to dismiss her if she refused to tender her resignation on his advice. The call for the bandh would not be applicable to the tribal areas keeping in view the Sarhul festival.

Addressing newsmen after meeting the Governor, NDA leaders, including Mr Nitish Kumar, said the Governor was the appointing authority of the Chief Minister and he could ask her to resign.

Mr Kumar said the Governor was apprised of these points by the NDA leaders. Among others who were present in the Press conference included Mr Nand Kishore Yadav, Mr Raghunath Jha, Mr Laxmi Shahu, Mr Gajendra Prasad Himanshu and Mr Vijayendra Prasad Yadav. Mr Kumar was of the view that the Chief Minister would have to resign now. "It does not matter whether she likes to resign or not", he remarked.

Maintaining that charge sheeted politicians, including Laloo Yadav, had to resign in the past, Mr Nitish Kumar said that Mrs Rabri Devi would also have to bow out of the office as a charge sheeted person could not continue on a constitutional post.

Taking a dig at the Congress, Mr Nitish Kumar wondered how it would continue supporting a government headed by a charge sheeted person. He said the Congress had promised to provide a corruption-free

administration. "I have therefore a question for the Congress as to how a corruption-free administration will be provided in the state by supporting a charge sheeted Chief Minister?"

He said the Congress in the past had adhered to the stand that no charge sheeted politician should continue on the constitutional post. He even asked the CPI(M) to make its stand clear on the issue. "We expect that both the Congress and the CPI(M) will also stick to their past stand that charge sheeted politicians should resign from a constitutional post".

Left divided

IN KEEPING with their differing perceptions on the Bihar situation, the Left parties have reacted differently to the CBI's filing a chargesheet against Chief Minister Rabri Devi and RJD leader Laloo Prasad Yadav for possessing assets disproportionate to their income.

The CPI-M dismissed the action as "motivated", the CPI demanded Rabri Devi's resignation and the CPI-ML (Liberation) said she "should" step down and even suggested that the RJD-Congress elect a new leader.

HTC, New Delhi

secretary M Venkaiah Naidu said.

He stressed that this would be the only proper course of action for her in view of the fact that all other political functionaries chargesheeted in courts of law in the past had chosen to give up office.

Rabri Devi too must follow the precedent set by figures like A R Antulay, Buta Singh, Sedapati Mutthiah, Madan Lal Khurana and even her husband Laloo Yadav himself, Mr Venkaiah Naidu said.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5, 2000

9.67 below
RABRI DEVI MUST RESIGN HP-12
57A

WITH THE CBI Special Court in Patna taking cognisance of the chargesheet against the Bihar Chief Minister, Mrs. Rabri Devi, as co-accused in a case against Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav (for possessing wealth disproportionate to his known sources of income), the ruling RJD-Congress(I) alliance is morally obliged to elect another leader to the Chief Minister's post. There may not be any express provision in the written law that Mrs. Rabri Devi will have to quit in the event of a chargesheet against her. But then, it is an established convention — that those facing prosecution must step down from Ministerial positions — and Mrs. Rabri Devi must accept it without any further delay. It would not be proper for Mr. Laloo Yadav to argue tendentiously against Mrs. Rabri Devi's resignation which is a necessity in these circumstances. Such a development — where the chief guardian of the law enforcing machinery in the State faces arrest yet resists the move — will only amount to making a mockery of the norms of accountability in the democratic setup.

Indeed, the whole manner in which the case has been pursued by the CBI, particularly the timing of it, raises a set of questions. As for instance, the fact that the CBI was seen doing nothing with the case after its officers raided the official residence of the Chief Minister (as long ago as in August 1998) and claimed to have found incriminating documents to prove its case. And then, the investigating agency seemed to wake up only after Mrs. Rabri Devi was sworn in as Chief Minister after the ignominious exit of the NDA's short-lived Government in the State. But notwithstanding these factors, that Mrs. Rabri Devi is now having to face prosecution along with her husband, Mr. Laloo Yadav (although the main accused here is Mr. Yadav, the nature of the case is such that other members of the family too are sent up to trial and there is nothing unusual about this),

requires her to step down from office. And it has now become imperative for the RJD, as the party heading the coalition in the State, to find another leader to take over as the Chief Minister. In the same manner, the Congress(I) on whose support the Government depends for survival as well as the smaller groups — the BSP and the CPI(M) — must prevail upon the leading partner in the coalition to replace Mrs. Rabri Devi.

All this, however, does not mean in any sense an accretion to the NDA's claim to power in Bihar. The fact that the RJD-led coalition enjoys unquestionably the majority support in the State Assembly cannot be conveniently relegated to the background. The Governor, Mr. Vinod Pande, must ensure that any such attempts to distort this reality will be immediately scotched. In this context, it is important for the leaders of the RJD-led coalition to get their act together in right earnest and elect another leader immediately. Any delay in this regard could only pave the way for confusion and chaos and end up helping the adversaries in some way.

The unseemly conduct of a set of Mrs. Rabri Devi's Cabinet colleagues haggling in public over the allocation of portfolios has exposed, even otherwise, some of the weak links in the coalition. All these are factors that the political leadership of the RJD-led coalition must consider and act with a sense of urgency. It is also important that the decision in this regard — to find a replacement for Mrs. Rabri Devi — is taken in a democratic manner rather than following the course adopted by the RJD in July 1997 when Mr. Laloo Yadav simply anointed his wife to take over as Chief Minister. Those in the RJD would do well to see the dangers involved in following such a course, not just to themselves and their political future but also to the State's polity, and hence resist such moves at least now.

THE HINDU

- 5 APR 2000

CBI FILES CHARGESHEET IN ASSETS CASE

Non-bailable warrants against Rabri, Laloo

By K. Balchand

PATNA, APRIL 4. The CBI today filed chargesheets against the Bihar Chief Minister, Mrs. Rabri Devi, and the former Chief Minister, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, in the designated court in the 'disproportionate assets (DA) case' (RC 5a/98) plunging the 24-day-old coalition Government into crisis.

The Special CBI Judge, Mr. S.K. Lal, according to reliable sources, has taken cognisance of the chargesheet which has accused Mr. Yadav of accumulating property worth Rs. 42 lakhs in excess of his known sources of income, and Mrs. Rabri Devi of aiding and abetting the former in the crime.

Mr. Lal also ordered the issuance of non-bailable arrest warrants against the couple.

However, the CBI DIG, Mr. R.K. Asthana, maintained that he was unaware of the order as the judge had not pronounced it in the court room.

He took the view that Mr. Lal might have dictated his order but was expecting the judge to read it out in the court room tomorrow and issue the processes at the same time.

The CBI had prayed that the court take cognisance of the chargesheet and issue NBWs against the Chief Minister. The CBI is likely to have the warrants of arrests issued soon after the judge makes his order public tomorrow.

The timing of the order, legal experts maintain, could be critical as Mr. Yadav is to appear before the designated court tomorrow in connection with the framing of charges in the first conspiracy aspect case in the fodder scam cases. Mr. Yadav, however, maintained that he would appear before the court tomorrow.

It is the second time that the CBI has filed a chargesheet against an incumbent Chief Min-



The RJD chief, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, addressing a press conference in Patna on Tuesday, after the CBI court ordered issuance of a non-bailable arrest warrant against him and his wife, Mrs. Rabri Devi, Bihar Chief Minister, in the disproportionate assets case. — Photo: Ranjeet Kumar

ister in Bihar. The first to achieve the dubious distinction was, of course, Mr. Yadav himself when he had to step down as Chief Minister on July 25, 1997, when the Supreme Court turned down his plea for anticipatory bail. He surrendered before the court after high drama.

This is the first case against Mrs. Rabri Devi who has been named a co-accused following raids at the Chief Minister's residence in connection with the case the CBI had lodged against Mr. Yadav in 1998 pertaining to the property he had amassed during 1990-96.

The CBI had interrogated Mr. Yadav too in this connection and had submitted the papers to the Governor, Mr. V.C. Pande, on March 8, 2000 seeking his sanction to prosecute them, which the latter subsequently accorded.

The DA case is the fifth case against Mr. Yadav who has obtained bail in the other four cases pertaining to the fodder scam.

Notwithstanding the confusion

over the court's ruling, it is clear that the State would witness another political battle which the rivals intend to settle on the streets. Even as the NDA leaders issued a call for a Bihar bandh on April 7, the RJD, in a counter-move, has called for a bandh on the price rise issue, over which the CPI(M) and the Congress(I) too are girding their loins.

Soon after the CBI action, NDA leaders, led by Mr. Nitish Kumar, called on the Governor and demanded that he direct Mrs. Rabri Devi to resign if she failed to do so on her own.

The Congress(I), which is part of the coalition, has given the Chief Minister some breathing space by not committing itself thus far on the issue. The Bihar PCC chief, Mr. Chandan Bagchi, said the decision of the CWC in this regard would be final and noted that the party had supported the RJD and not an individual.

Rabri won't quit, says Laloo: Page 13

Bihar's 'god' goes to jail in style

NALIN VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA, April 5. — Over 30 members of the Rabri Devi Cabinet and a large number of RJD leaders and supporters escorted Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav to the Beur central jail today after the CBI-designated court refused bail and remanded him to judicial custody.

The ministers, including those of the Congress, accompanied the RJD supremo into the hall next to the prison superintendent's chamber and kept him entertained until the jail authorities made "proper arrangements" to lodge the VIP prisoner.

"He may be a culprit in CBI's

eyes, but he's God as far as we're concerned," said an RJD minister, carrying a basket of apples to offer the "Raja of Bihar". Most ministers in the entourage were carrying oranges, grapes and other fruits for the RJD chief.

"It's too hot, Laloo ji will need lots of fruit and fruit juice," one of them said.

Clearly, the "Raja of Bihar" will enjoy every creature comfort behind bars as long as "Rani Rabri Devi" is in power.



Laloo: not forsaken by supporters

Also, senior ministers and top bureaucrats will keep in regular touch with the jailed defacto chief minister. After all, they used to pay him regular visits during Mr Yadav's two earlier stints in judicial custody.

But the troubles for Bihar's first couple apparently have just begun. The court has started the trial in the CBI's regular case (20A/96) against Mr Yadav and it is all set soon to begin the trial in the DA case(5A/98) as

well. The CBI is "confident" of securing conviction, at least in the DA case.

The "Raja", however, seemed to have shed his usual arrogance. Unlike on the two previous occasions when he got the cozy BMP-5 guest house converted into a jail and walked in as a prisoner, Mr Yadav today went to jail without a fuss.

Some NDA leaders fear "he may try and win over some hardcore NDA-supported criminal-turned-legislators lodged in the same jail". For, jail or bail, Mr Laloo Yadav is a deft manipulator, who has perfected the art of making the friends in times of need and dumping them just as fast when the need is no more.

THE STATESMAN

6 APR 2000

Cong. keeping Bihar Govt. alive: NDA

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 5. Amid indications that the Congress(I) will not do anything at this juncture to "destabilise" the Rashtriya Janata Dal-led Government, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) appeared to be running out of patience.

This was evident in the attack by the Samata Party and the Janata Dal (United) directed against the Congress(I) for continuing its support to the "tainted" Rabri Devi Ministry. The Samata Party president, Ms. Java Jaitly, and the Communications Minister, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, in separate statements blamed the Congress(I) for keeping alive the RJD Ministry and wanted to know how long the party would continue its support despite the chargesheets.

The CPI(M) was the only party which came

out openly in support of the Rabri Devi Government and asserted that there was no justification for its resignation. In a formal statement, the politburo of the party argued that when the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, and the Union Human Resource Development Minister, Dr. Murlidhar Joshi, could continue in office despite being chargesheeted in the Babri Masjid demolition case, there was no case for the RJD Government to step down.

The BJP general secretary and spokesperson, Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, said that while the cases against the Yadav couple related to moral turpitude, those against the Union Ministers were in the category of political agitation. He said since 1947 to date no person who had been chargesheeted in a corruption case had continued in office. The AICC general sec-

retary in charge of Bihar, Ms. Mohsina Kidwai, said the Congress(I) Working Committee would decide. One of the factors that the CWC would have to consider is the reluctance of the party's MLAs in Bihar (all of them Ministers) to snap links with the RJD. Even those dissatisfied with their portfolios are of the opinion that the Congress(I) should continue supporting the RJD. Some of them, including Mr. Chandra Shekhar Dubey, arrived in Delhi today and petitioned party leaders to speak to the RJD leadership for a change in their ministries.

While no date has been fixed for the CWC meeting, it is not likely to be held before the weekend as the party president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, left this evening on a two-day trip to her constituency.

More reactions on Page 13

SURRENDER IN CBI COURT; CRISIS AVERTED

Rabri gets bail, Laloo remanded

6/3 By K. Balchand HD-1

PATNA, APRIL 5: The Bihar Chief Minister, Mrs. Rabri Devi, and her husband and former Chief Minister, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, today surrendered in the 'disproportionate assets' (DA) case before the designated court of the Central Bureau of Investigation. The court rejected Mr. Laloo Yadav's bail petition but granted bail to Mrs. Rabri Devi. This averted a political crisis that threatened to envelop the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the ruling coalition.

The Chief Minister and Mr. Yadav surrendered in the court after it had taken cognisance of the chargesheet filed against them by the CBI in the case on Monday. The CBI Special Judge, Mr. S.K. Lal, had also ordered the issuance of non-bailable arrest warrants against the couple. *S. K. Lal*

Mr. and Mrs. Laloo Yadav were among the first to arrive at the court premises around 7.15 a.m. and surrendered even though the CBI had not yet obtained the arrest warrants from the court. In fact, the RJD camp had kept a night-long vigil on the CBI. The strategy apparently was that the Chief Minister and Mr. Yadav would surrender before the CBI judge — no matter what time — should the investigating agency succeed in procuring the arrest warrants.

On surrendering, they moved their bail petitions which were heard forthwith. Mr. Lal turned down the bail petition of Mr. Laloo Yadav on the ground that he was the main accused and that the allegations against him were quite serious.

On the other hand, he granted bail to the Chief Minister in view of the nature of the allegations and that under existing family relations in society the wife was always under the influence of her husband. She was asked to furnish a bond for Rs. 2 lakhs with two separate sureties for a like amount.

Mrs. Rabri Devi was in the court room for about 75 minutes. The court remanded Mr. Yadav to judicial custody but did not specify



The Bihar Chief Minister, Mrs. Rabri Devi and her husband, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav entering a special CBI court in Patna on Wednesday. — Reuters

the date for his production in the court which it intended to fix later. (However, UNI said Mr. Laloo had been remanded to 14 days custody.)

Mr. Yadav said he and his wife had surrendered even before the court papers were served on them to dispel doubts in any quarter and because they respected the judiciary. This is the third time that Mr. Yadav has been remanded to judicial custody. On two earlier occasions, it was in connection with the conspiracy angle cases centering round the fodder scam.

The CBI in its chargesheet had said that Mr. Yadav had assets worth Rs. 42 lakhs in excess of his known sources of income and that his wife abetted in the crime. In their joint petition, the Yadavs maintained that they were being hounded by the CBI at the behest of the NDA Government at the Centre; also, that the CBI had

omitted to take into account Mr. Yadav's income prior to 1990 and had over-assessed their assets without justification to make out a false case. The court directed the IGP (Prisons), and the Superintendent of the Patna Central Jail, Beur, to provide adequate security to Mr. Yadav in the light of the fact that several dreaded criminals had been lodged there currently.

Charges in fodder case

After disposing of the bail petitions, the court framed charges against Mr. Yadav and Dr. Jagannath Mishra, former Chief Minister, and 50 others in the first conspiracy angle case related to the fodder scam and announced that the trial would start on June 19. The case relates to the fraudulent withdrawal of Rs. 37.7 crores from the Chaibasa treasury.

The court said that over 400 witnesses had been cited and that

it would take not less than 1,000 working days if the trial were to proceed on a day-to-day basis even if only 75 per cent of them were examined. It would take no less than five years to complete the trial given that there were just about 200 working days in a year.

Soon after Mrs. Rabri Devi secured bail, Mr. Yadav stood his ground and ruled out the possibility of her resigning as Chief Minister reiterating that everyone was equal in the eyes of the law.

The NDA leaders seem to have lost some of their newfound fire soon after the Chief Minister secured bail. They staged a dharna under the leadership of Mr. Nitish Kumar demanding the resignation of the Chief Minister and that the Governor should dismiss her. They, however, changed their stand in maintaining that they had not tried to topple the Rabri Devi Government.

THE HINDU

6 APR 2000

6 APR 2000

Poor response to NDA bandh in Bihar

By K. Balchandra

PATNA, APRIL 7. The Bihar bandh, called by the National Democratic Alliance to press its demand for the resignation of the Chief Minister, Mrs. Rabri Devi, following the CBI chargesheet against her in the disproportionate assets case, evoked a lukewarm response.

The bandh passed off peacefully with no major untoward incident. Trains were detained in some places for a short while but the timely intervention of police restored train services. In some places, roads were also blocked.

Shops were closed in the heart of the city but normal life was almost unaffected in the capital. Surprisingly, even the busy Dak Bungalow crossing was bereft of NDA supporters and the traffic flow was uninterrupted. The NDA's supporters, particularly the BJP, which has a good base in the central part of the city, did not come out to enforce the bandh. Offices, including central government undertakings, functioned.

Those who did come out, including the NDA steering committee chairman, Mr. Nitish Kumar, the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Mr. Sushil Kumar Modi, and the State BJP president, Mr. Nand Kishore Yadav, were taken into custody. NDA leaders termed the bandh a total success. The Home Secretary, Mr. U. N. Panjiar, said life re-



Police arresting the former Bihar Chief Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar, during the bandh in Patna on Friday. — Photo: PTI

mained normal throughout the State and that about 2000 bandh supporters were rounded up including some MPs and MLAs. Train services were restored without much delay at the few affected points.

Mrs. Rabri Devi described the bandh as a total flop, saying the

people had clearly rejected the NDA's demand that she resign.

The former Prime Minister, Mr. H. D. Deve Gowda, called on the former Chief Minister and RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, in jail and met the Chief Minister at her official residence to express solidarity. Mr. Gowda,

who is among the four former Prime Ministers who are working in tandem with one another to give a new turn to politics, accused Mr. Vajpayee, of "harassing" the RJD chief and Mrs. Rabri Devi.

Cong. leaders in Delhi: Page 13
Gowda blames PM: Page 15

DARK TUNNEL

Srb. 8/10 Bihar crisis deepens

THE CBI charge-sheet against Bihar chief minister, Rabri Devi and her subsequent arrest only deepens the crisis in Bihar. Though the lady is out on bail, and still in office, it cannot be assumed that she will be able to tide over the crisis. The NDA has certainly recovered some of the ground lost in the election process but it is hard to quantify the gain in any meaningful terms. The numbers in the assembly are not going to change — and Nitish Kumar's resignation ahead of the trust vote last month suggests that an NDA government in Bihar is not exactly round the corner. Rabri Devi is under siege but she feels no obligation to resign. NDA leaders are not very well placed to make such a demand considering the cases of both Advani and Uma Bharati — chargesheeted in the Babari Masjid demolition case. Worse, both have repeatedly ignored summons to appear in court. Ram Vilas Paswan tried to get around this with the curious argument that Rabri Devi was charged with an economic offence while Advani faces a criminal charge. The logic is incomprehensible. Conceding that precedents apply, even bad ones, the dynamics of coalition government can make things pretty awkward for the Bihar chief minister. It has already been reported that there is great unhappiness in the state unit of the Congress against Rabri Devi's continuance in office. At the moment, there is no talk of withdrawal of support. But Congress leaders are scheduled to meet soon to discuss the issue.

All is, thus, not well in the state. For the common man the farce that passes for governance which they have endured for more than 50 years shows no sign of giving way to some kind of ordered public and political life. In the last month or so, agitations, first by the RJD and then by the NDA have brought the state and its capital to a screeching halt. Shops, banks and markets remain closed. Government employees take the opportunity to stay at home. Schools and colleges shut down. Citizens suffer. It does not follow that if there had been no charge-sheet against Rabri Devi, government would have been stable or performed better. The charge-sheet does, however, make things a lot worse. Thanks to dynastic succession, a premium on incompetence and a total lack of accountability, conditions for good governance do not exist and are unlikely to materialise any time soon. To many people the logical solution to the problem is that Rabri Devi steps down for the sake of the party and in the interests of a certain minimal political transparency, while someone else become chief minister. Obviously, this is not a practical proposition in the circumstances. As a result, the crisis continues to snowball. And he is a brave man who can see any light at the end of this particularly messy tunnel.

THE STATESMAN

10 APR 2000

Bihar — then and now

By C. Subramaniam

The Congress should take stock of its national role at this juncture and demonstrate that it stands for probity and cleanliness in public life.

1969. ELECTIONS to the Bihar Assembly were held, but no party got a majority. The Congress emerged as the single largest party and attempts were made to form a coalition Government. Harihar Singh who was elected leader of the Congress Party, worked out an alignment with the Swatantra Party and the Janata Party and in forming the Cabinet, he included the Raja of Ramgarh as a Cabinet Minister. There were cases in the High Court against the Raja and severe strictures had been passed against him on his dealings with his tenants and other matters connected with his landholdings. Many were surprised by his inclusion which had not been discussed in the Congress Working Committee before the decision was taken.

When the Working Committee met on March 7, I raised this issue. I particularly voiced my opposition on the ground that there were strictures against him by the court, I was supported not only by Kam-araj but also by Sanjeevaiah, Fakruddin Ali Ahmed and Jagjivan Ram. In the face of this strong criticism, Congress president Nijalingappa took full responsibility and offered to resign. But he was persuaded by members not to take such a step. S. K. Patil and a few others felt that since the inclusion of the Raja of Ramgarh was a *fait accompli*, the matter should be allowed to rest at that. They, however, pointed out that in future care should be taken to avoid similar mistakes.

I was not satisfied with this decision to allow the matter to rest. So I sent the following letter to the Congress president, submitting my resignation as member of the Congress Working Committee: "I want to assure you that I am not taking this decision in haste. I have been pondering over the events in Bihar and I feel the step we have taken in forming the Ministry in collaboration with the Janata Party and with the leader of the party as a member of the Cabinet is going to hurt the party very badly not only in Bihar but in other States also. I expressed my views as strongly as possible in the Working Committee yesterday and while there was general consensus that what we had done was not quite proper, it was felt that nothing can possibly be done at this stage. I strongly disagree with this approach. Under the circumstances, I

feel I should tender my resignation of my membership of the Working Committee, as I cannot express my views concerning this while continuing as a member. You will kindly accept my resignation. I have been functioning as Chairman of the Committee on Political and Economic Strategy. If you wish me to continue that work, I have no objection."

In reply, I received a letter from the Congress general secretary stating that my letter was placed before the Working Committee and that, while appreciating my feelings, it had unanimously decided that I should be requested to withdraw my resignation. I refused to, unless my demand for the exclusion of the Raja of Ramgarh from the Bihar Ministry was met. By insisting on my resignation I forced the High Command to reopen the issue. I felt that the mistake should be rectified by asking Harihar Singh, Chief Minister, to submit his resignation and reform the Ministry without the Raja. My letter of resignation was taken up for consideration by the Working Committee, the next day.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who could not attend the meeting of the Working Committee on the previous day due to indisposition, attended this meeting. I was not present at the meeting. Indira Gandhi told the Working Committee members that she was not consulted before permission was given to Harihar Singh to include the Raja of Ramgarh. Some of the other senior members also disclaimed responsibility for what had happened. Before attending the Working Committee the Prime Minister sent for me and discussed the situation arising out of my resignation. I firmly told her that I would not withdraw my resignation unless the mistake was rectified. The Prime Minister informed the Working Committee that she had not been able to persuade me to withdraw my resignation.

The Prime Minister took the initiative to send for the Chief Minister from Bihar to have further discussions with the Congress Executive. Nijalingappa was requested by

the Working Committee to postpone his departure to Australia and he had a telephonic conversation with the Bihar Chief Minister. My suggestion that the Chief Minister must be asked to submit the resignation of his Cabinet to the Governor and reconstitute it without the Raja of Ramgarh was gaining ground. The majority in the Working Committee also felt that it was not possible to solve the crisis if it was better for the Congress to sit in the Opposition. The Congress Working Committee again met on March 13 and unanimously endorsed the stand taken by me with regard to the formation of the Bihar Ministry. The Congress President asked the Bihar Chief Minister to persuade the Raja of Ramgarh to quit the Cabinet voluntarily. If, however, the Raja refused to oblige, the Chief Minister was asked to submit the resignation of his Ministry and reconstitute it without the Raja.

After this I sent a telegram from Madras withdrawing my resignation saying that I was doing so in deference to the unanimous wish to the Working Committee and that I was highly gratified by the decision on the Bihar Ministry. The 1969 Bihar episode showed that it was necessary to lay down the criteria for having an alliance with other parties and that no unprincipled alliance should be resorted to solely for the purpose of getting into power.

After three decades, a more ticklish situation has arisen in Bihar. The recent happenings in Bihar leave an old Congressmen like me profoundly sad. What a fall for a party which was in the vanguard of our freedom movement under the epoch-making leadership of Mahatma! In the recent elections to the Bihar Assembly, the Congress had opposed the Rashtriya Janata Dal characterising the RJD rule as "jungle raj". While the RJD romped home as the largest single party, the Congress fared poorly with a mere 24 seats. Pre-pol, diatribes strangely gave way to post-poll bonhomie. The Congress has sealed an alliance with a party whose *de jure* and *de facto* Chief Ministers have both

been charge-sheeted for corruption in a court of law and arrested.

In a cynical bargain, all the Congress MLAs have been rewarded with office — one as Speaker and the rest as Ministers. On top of this, in a show of righteous indignation, the Congress is clamouring for a higher share of important portfolios and it appears to be succeeding in this effort. This is a transparent attempt at manipulating a majority by installing a jumbo Cabinet. In my view, this is a flagrant negation of the parliamentary system and of Constitutional norms and the worst form of corruption. It is indeed tragic that the Congress is in the thick of these murky goings-on and is also involved in propping up one of the most corrupt regimes in the country. Evocative memories fill my heart when I look back upon the halcyon days of the Congress. Soaring idealism, love of the country, passion to serve the people and uncompromising adherence to some norms and principles — these animated the Congress of those days.

Prolonged and unchallenged access to power had gradually eroded some of the pristine values. Departure from norms was still an exception and cynicism had not taken centre stage. After the party has been pushed out of power and relegated to a weak second position, hunger for lost power appears to be dominating the Congress psyche. It is indeed legitimate for a prominent political party to attempt to gain power in a democratic polity. But, not at any cost — that too for a party with such hoary traditions. With its rich heritage, the Congress should endeavour to be a role model for the other parties and not adopt access to power as the *raison d'être* of political existence. Even now it is not too late. The Congress can still undo the damage it has inflicted upon itself in Bihar.

The Congress should realise that corruption is a major malaise afflicting the country's body politic and should firmly set its face against this evil. Its alliance in Tamil Nadu is also unfortunately sending wrong signals to the public and can also desensitise people to this major problem. The Congress should take stock of its national role at this juncture and demonstrate that it stands for probity and cleanliness in public life. This is a cry of anguish from an old Congressman.

Violence overtakes Vananchal session in Bihar Assembly

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA, APRIL 25

VIOLENCE erupted in the Bihar Assembly during its special session today as ruling and Opposition members indulged in flinging chairs and mikes at each other over Opposition leader Sushil Kumar Modi's remarks against Chief Minister Rabri Devi, leading to the adjournment of the House.

Modi's remark that Rabri Devi, after being charge-sheeted in a disproportionate assets case, had lost control over the administration sparked off trouble with her brother Sadhu Yadav and Minister of State for Commercial Taxes Dadan Singh advancing towards the Opposition benches, picking up

chairs and repeatedly banging them on the desk before flinging one towards him.

Modi made the remark while making obituary references for lone MCC MLA Gurudas Chatterjee, who was gunned down near Dhanbad on April 14. An agitated RJD president Laloo Prasad Yadav and Chief Minister Rabri Devi sprang to their feet and engaged in a heated exchange with Modi and other NDA members. "Hum sabka *muth noch lenge*" (I will scratch your faces), Rabri was heard telling Modi, who stuck to his guns saying she had lost control over the administration, leading to an alarming rise in political killings in the state. The NDA MLAs reacted sharply, raised slogans against the government and demanded the

dismissal of the Rabri Devi government. Slogans like "*nikarnni sarkar ka barkhast karo*" (dismiss the ineffective government) rent the air inside the Assembly.

As Opposition and ruling members were engaged in trading charges against each other, Sadhu Yadav and Dadan Singh ran menacingly towards Modi, who fell down after being hit by a chair thrown by BJP MLA Ashwini Chaubey. Several MLAs from both sides then came face to face in the well of the House and as a fierce combat appeared inevitable, others belonging to both sides were seen trying to calm tempers.

Amid the continuing din, Speaker Sadanand Singh adjourned the House barely 10 minutes after it had assembled on the



Chief Minister Rabri Devi, RJD president Laloo Prasad Yadav



opening day of the special session convened to consider the Bihar State Reorganisation (Vananchal) Bill, 2000.

When the House reassembled after 10 minutes, NDA MLAs boycotted the proceedings, accusing the RJD of terrorising the Opposition.

The CBI has allowed Laloo to

participate in a debate on the Bill for two days. Laloo had filed a petition in CBI court last Saturday seeking permission for attending the special session of the state Legislature for approval of the State Reorganisation Bill. He has been in Beaur model jail since April 5 in connection with the disproportionate assets case. However, he suggested a censure motion against Modi for his conduct. Laloo charged Modi with politicising the killing of Chatterjee and "making light the solemn occasion to express grief over it". "I regret the action of some of my MLAs but Modi deserves to be censured for his conduct," he said, adding the state government.

Ram Naresh Ram (CPI-ML) suggested the suspension of Sadhu Yadav for two days and the censure

of Modi, while Bhuvaneshwar Prasad Mehta, CPI Legislature Party Leader said the dignity of the House was lowered by today's incident. Later, talking to reporters in the Chief Minister's cabin, Laloo alleged that Modi's remark was intended to incite the RJD MLAs and create violence so that the Bill for creation of a separate Jharkhand state was not passed.

"They (NDA) whipped up passions to ensure trouble and to hinder passage of the state reorganisation Bill," he charged. Modi, on the other hand, alleged during his talks with newsmen at his Assembly chamber that the RJD wanted to terrorise the Opposition so that none could raise their voice against the government. BJP MLA Ramesh Singh Munda, who was

also present, showed a swelling on his head following the fracas. The NDA MLAs later sat on dharna in front of the Speaker's chamber chanting slogans against the government and marched to Raj Bhavan to register their protest.

Modi said the NDA MLAs had met Governor V.C. Pande and demanded immediate sacking of the Rabri Devi government and suspension of errant MLAs. "We urged the Governor to call for a report from the Speaker on today's occurrences and ensure that action is taken," he said, adding MLAs were not safe even inside the Assembly. Meanwhile, Rabri Devi charged the Governor with smothering democracy and alleged that the NDA was not in favour of the creation of Vananchal.

INDIAN EXPRESS

INDIAN EXPRESS

26 APR 2000

Violence rocks Assam bandh

OUR BUREAU

Feb. 29: Violence marked the 12-hour Assam bandh sponsored by the ruling Asom Gana Parishad. Seven persons, including five hardcore Ulfa militants, were killed since last evening.

The bandh was called in protest against the killing of state PWD and forest minister Nagen Sarma by Ulfa militants on Sunday in Nalbari district.

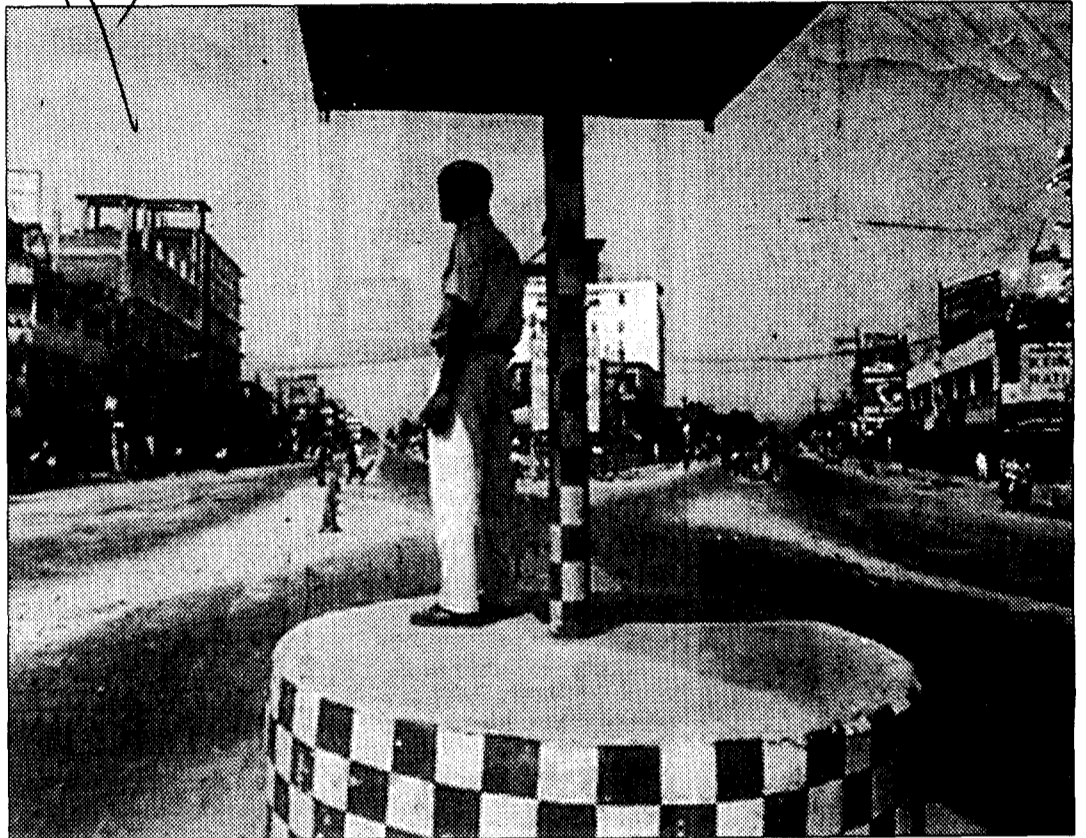
In a sudden move, the government today transferred Nalbari deputy commissioner A.K. Bhutani and superintendent of police, A.J. Barua. Their places will be taken by the Bongaigaon deputy commissioner B.R. Samal and additional SP. Tezpur, A.B. Krishnan, respectively. Bhutani has been shifted to the agriculture department as joint secretary, while Barua has been moved to Dhubri.

Two hardcore Ulfa militants were gunned down by the city police at Gorchuk in the wee hours. Another three hardcore rebels were killed in a joint operation by the Army, paramilitary and police personnel in Nalbari district.

Outlawed National Democratic Front of Boroland militants gunned down one Jalan Ali, a businessman, at Ghograpar under Tamalpur police station in Nalbari district last evening. They abducted another trader, Pinaki Mazumdar from Dwarkuchi under Rangia police station in Lower Assam.

Another youth, Ajit Das, succumbed to his injuries on the way to the hospital. He was shot at by a group of Khasi youth yesterday on the outskirts of the city along the Assam-Meghalaya border. His companion, Prabin Kalita, has been admitted to the hospital in a critical condition.

The bandh, sponsored by the ruling AGP was total, particularly in Lower Assam and some parts of Upper Assam. Unlike in previous years, the impact of the bandh was



LONE RANGER: A solitary policeman mans the deserted roads in Guwahati during the bandh on Tuesday. Picture by K. Anupam

also felt in the three districts of Barak Valley.

In the south Assam districts of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi, the bandh evoked a total response with all shops and markets remaining shut and traffic keeping off the roads. All the central and state government offices and educational institutions also wore a deserted look.

Police said there were no reports of any untoward incident in these districts.

Roads in the capital were also deserted since early morning with only a few security vehicles patrolling the streets. Offices, shops and business establishments were closed. However, educational institutions remained open in view of the higher secondary examination which began from today.

Additional superintendent of

police (city) P.K. Dutta told **The Telegraph** that a police patrol from Gorchuk outpost intercepted four motorcycle-borne youth. "When we asked them to stop, they tried to flee. When we gave them chase, the youth started firing at us, forcing us to retaliate. The firing lasted for nearly 10 minutes," he said. Two of the militants died on the spot but the others managed to escape.

He said while one of the slain militants was identified as Gagan Deka of Nalbari, the other has not been identified. One M-20 pistol, four rounds of ammunition and several incriminating documents were recovered from them.

Dutta said the documents included two letters addressed by Dristi Rajkhowa, the "most-wanted" self-styled action commander of the volcano unit of the Ulfa to

the leaders of Tripura National Volunteers. The police seized one of the Yamaha motorcycles, he added. Three hardcore militants have been killed by security forces in Nalbari district.

While two of them were identified as Mantu Kalita and Mantu Barman alias Manik Bihari, the third militant could not be identified till this evening.

One pistol, one carbine, and a stengun, a magazine of AK-47 rifle, several rounds of ammunition and a grenade were recovered from the militants.

Additional superintendent of police, P. Goswami said while Mantu Barman was killed after an encounter in Bamunpara village near Ghograpar, two other rebels were gunned down in Phatamara-Khoukuchi-Chuburi this morning.

THE TELEGRAPH

• 1 MAR 2000

ULFA opposes bandh, bullies ministers

GUWAHATI: The banned ULFA has opposed the 12-hour 'Assam bandh' sponsored by the ruling Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) on Tuesday and threatened that members of the Mahanta ministry would 'meet the same fate' as slain PWD and forest minister Nagen Sarma.

ULFA central publicity secretary Mithinga Daimary in a faxed message to the local media here on Monday night appealed to the people to oppose the bandh and said that Mr Sarma was killed as "punishment for being an agent of the central government."

The outfit warned the other ministers "to change their political stand and overall attitude towards the welfare of the people of Assam to avoid the same fate as Mr Sarma."

The AGP called the bandh from 5.a.m. on Tuesday to protest the killing of Mr Sarma along with four others by the militant outfit which exploded a powerful improvised explosive devise (IED) under his official vehicle at Bahjani in Nalbari district on Sunday. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 1 MAR 2000

Cong offers conditional support to RJD

Soren sings a new tune

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI/PATNA, March 1. — The Congress has decided to extend conditional support to an RJD government in Bihar.

The decision was taken at a three-hour Congress Working Committee meeting tonight. After the meeting Mr Pranab Mukherjee said Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav had been asked to come to Delhi to hear the Congress point of view regarding the conditional support.

Mr Yadav was contacted from the CWC meeting and he is believed to have agreed to come to Delhi tomorrow. Senior Congress leaders, Mr Madhavrao Scindia and Ms Mohsina Kidwai will put forth a

charter of demands before Mr Yadav. If he agrees, the party will announce its support.

Whether the Congress would extend outside support and if a written pledge would be submitted to the Bihar Governor, will also be decided after tomorrow's meeting.

Earlier in the day, both Mrs Rabri Devi and Mr Nitish Kumar met the Governor and staked their claim to form the government after the former resigned as the Chief Minister and recommended the dissolution of the old House.

Mr Vinod Chandra Pandey asked Mrs Rabri Devi to hold the office till the next government was formed. The Election Commission earlier notified the constitu-

tion of the new House.

Although the magic figure of 162 eluded both the claimants, Mr Nitish Kumar, who has been elected as the NDA leader, submitted the list of 146 MLAs. The NDA leader got a boost in his efforts to form the government as three underworld operators, elected as Independent candidates formally supported it from behind the bars.

The NDA list included 12 Independents and equal number of the JMM-S legislators as the JMM-S finally decided to support the NDA. The JMM-S chief, Mr Shibu Soren, accompanied Mr Kumar and other NDA leaders to the Raj Bhavan.

■ See SUPPORT: page 6

(Continued from page 1)

Mr Soren who till yesterday demanded the top post in lieu of his support to any party, today said: "The post of CM is not significant... We want separate Jharkhand state which the NDA has agreed to give."

Mrs Rabri Devi also met the Governor and staked her claim on the grounds that the RJD has emerged as the single largest party. The RJD and allies have 126 seats in the Assembly.

Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav said: "We have majority which we are certain to prove on the floor of the House."

Mr Nitish Kumar, on the other hand, claimed that the NDA was commanding the majority. "I have submitted the list of 146 MLAs", he said, adding: "Talks were in progress with other parties and individual MLAs... We will prove our majority on the floor of the House."

The RJD supremo, however, disputed the NDA list saying:

"The NDA has submitted the fake signatures of some MLAs... Besides, the NDA has also included in its list as many as eight MLAs who have won the polls as the NDA rebels."

Mr Yadav said: "All those who don't figure in the NDA list are supporting us... The submission of the list of 146 MLAs by NDA itself means the NDA has reached its saturation point." He said the NDA can "never achieve the magic figure".

Both Mr Yadav and Mr Kumar said the Governor gave them "patient hearing".

The AICC general secretary, Mrs Mohsina Kidwai, who had been sent here from the party high command to assess the mood of the party MLAs talked to them and returned to New Delhi.

Congress insiders revealed that about 18 out of their 23 MLAs were in a mood to support the RJD government.

The BPCC general secretary, Mr Shakil-uz-Zammah, however,

er, disputed any difference in the Congress. "All the Congress legislators will unitedly do what the party high command will ask them to do."

Ironically, the Congress which has got only 23 seats is all set to play a very crucial role in the formation of the next government.

The RJD and the Congress grapevine have it that the RJD will face little problem in forming the government once the Congress supports it. Because the RJD may rope into the five BSP MLAs and those Independents who don't figure in the NDA list. The total number of Independents is 20.

CPI and CPI-ML (Liberation) which together have 11 MLAs too were reported to be waiting for the Congress's decision. The sources in CPI which earlier claimed that it would maintain "equi-distance" from RJD and NDA said: CPI may reconsider its decision if the Congress decides to unitedly support the RJD.

NDA, RJD stake their claim to form govt. in Bihar

By K. Balchand

PATNA, MARCH 1. The Bihar Chief Minister, Mrs. Rabri Devi, and the Union Agriculture Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar (leader of the Samata Party, an ally of the BJP), today staked their claim to form the next government in the State.

The Governor, Mr. V. C. Pandey, gave two leaders a patient hearing. He is likely to consult legal experts before taking a decision.

Earlier, the Rabri Devi Government recommended the dissolution of the House and the Chief Minister submitted her resignation to the Governor. The Election Commission had notified the constitution of the new House on Tuesday night.

Mr. Kumar accompanied, among others, by the JMM(S) president, Mr. Shibu Soren, called on the Governor and submitted a list of 146 MLAs, comprising 122 of the NDA, 12 of the JMM and as many Independents. The total was still 16 short of the magic figure of 162 required to form the Government.

Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Rabri Devi, accompanied by her husband and RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, and the CPI(M) State secretary, Mr. Ganesh Shanker Vidhyarthi, staked claim saying she was the leader of not



The RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav and his wife, Mrs. Rabri Devi, at the Raj Bhavan in Patna on Wednesday. (Right) Mr. Nitish Kumar (Samata Party) and Mr. Shibu Soren (JMM) — third and fourth from left — after meeting the Governor. — Photo: Ranjeet Kumar

only the single largest party but also an alliance in the new House.

Mr. Laloo Yadav assured the Governor that the RJD had the support of like-minded parties and that he was welcome to ascertain their leanings. He also urged the latter to verify the signatures of the 12 independents that Mr. Kumar had submitted saying the NDA list included the names of those who contested the elections as rebels.

Mr. Kumar, on the other hand, said his claim was backed by a

greater number of legislators and that he would form a coalition Government comprising constituents of the NDA the JMM(S).

Late on Tuesday night, the NDA leaders secured the JMM(S) support saying the State would come under President's rule if the alliance was unable to form the government.

PTI, UNI report

Mrs. Mohsina Kidwai, AICC general secretary in charge of Bihar, said the Congress(I) would not support the NDA and that she

would convey the anti-Laloo feelings of the State unit to the party president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi.

Mrs. Kidwai, who was here to assess the mood of the party MLAs and workers, had a feel of anti-Laloo sentiments when she was virtually mobbed by the agitated partymen at Sadaquat Ashram, party headquarters.

The Revolutionary Socialist Party, with two MLAs, has decided to support the RJD in forming the next government.

Gujarat RSS muddle deepens as Govt rejects discussion

Issue rocks Lok Sabha for the fifth consecutive day

Objectionable statements: RS adjourned twice

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 1

THE IMPASSE on the RSS issue deepened today, with the government refusing to concede the Opposition demand that the discussion on the Gujarat Government's order to permit its employees to participate in RSS activities should be put to a vote in the House under Rule 184.

A defiant, determined and united Opposition, staying firm on their demand, forced two adjournments in the Lok Sabha, amidst uproar. Government sources, however, insisted that the matter was already under discussion under Rule 193 and could not be kept in abeyance or converted into another motion.

With the controversy gripping the Lok Sabha for the fifth consecutive day, the niceties involving whether the matter is admissible for voting is now being overtaken by political considerations. While the immediate political concerns centre around the Congress rally on March 6 and the Telugu Desam's preoccupation with next week's municipal elections in Andhra Pradesh, the larger picture deals with the broad ideological affiliations along the secular-communal lines.

For the present, there was no apparent solution in sight. An all-party meeting convened by Lok Sabha Speaker immediately after the first adjournment of the day failed to break the

persisting deadlock.

Informal efforts to broker a peace formula too seemed to have come to a nought. These centred around suggestions that the contents of the notice under 184 be diluted so that even if there was a vote on it, it did not amount to a censure of the government. It could, for instance, be read to indicate that the House takes serious note of or expresses concern at the developments in Gujarat, it was suggested.

The Congress notice on the motion, as it stands now, is a sharp indictment of the Government of India for its failure to discharge its "constitutional responsibility" to protect secularism, which is one of the basic tenets of the Constitution, by not prevailing upon the Gujarat Government to withdraw the circular lifting the ban on its employees to participate in RSS activities.

Dismissing suggestions about a possible dilution of the notice, Chief Whip of Congress Priya Ranjan Dasgupta pointed out that the motion would not be eligible for admission unless it was substantive. He also said that the purpose of the motion would be defeated unless there is an element of censure.

Mr Dasgupta also made it clear that the Congress would not do anything without consulting other Opposition parties. "It is a joint opposition effort and Congress would not do anything unilaterally," he said.

Justifying their decision to seek a vote on the

discussion, Congress' deputy leader in the Lok Sabha Madhavrao Scindia highlighted the seriousness of the issue and maintained that "the people have a right to know where parties and leaders stand on it."

"Our protest will continue until the government decides to adopt a democratic path," Mr Scindia declared, recalling that during the minority government of P V Narasimha Rao, the Congress regime had tackled four adjournment motions.

He also pointed out that the Opposition had extended unstinted cooperation to the government in the presentation of the Railway and General Budgets, the Congress leader said that the government too should be responsive. "Cooperation cannot be one-sided," he said.

Wondering why the government was afraid of a discussion under such a motion, Mr Scindia made it clear that the Congress was not trying to topple the government through a vote on the issue. He also underlined that even if the government loses in the voting, it will not fall.

The ruling BJP, however, was sceptical about it. "No self-respecting individual would continue if the allies do not vote with the government on the matter," a senior BJP leader maintained.

That besides, he said, the Opposition leaders would be among the first to demand that the government go on the issue.

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 1

THE RAJYA Sabha today was adjourned twice when members accused each other of making objectionable statements.

The Deputy Chairperson, Mrs Najma Heptullah, who announced she was starting a healthy, new practice of making short-term adjournments for checking records so that members can be asked to withdraw offensive or factually incorrect statements on the day of making them itself, came to regret it when members began demanding adjournments on trivial grounds.

First, Law Minister Ram Jethmalani, while participating in the short duration discussion on the government's failure to prevail upon the Gujarat government to withdraw its notice on government employees joining the RSS, said "Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by the people who conceded to India's partition". That raised the Congress and Left's hackles.

When Mr Jethmalani refused to withdraw his statements saying he had meant the killing of Gandhi's spirit not body, Congress leaders Pranab Mukherjee and Valayar Ravi, joined by some Leftist members raised a din demanding he withdraw his remark.

When the Minister denied making it, they wanted Mrs Heptullah to check the records.

The Deputy Chairperson held the view that members regularly get away making wild allegations and

offensive remarks.

Since the proceedings are telecast live, viewers make up their mind on the spot and the purpose of expunging these remarks from the records is lost because people's minds are made up by then. So, stating she wanted to set a healthy precedent, she adjourned the House for 15 minutes.

After the House reconvened, Mrs Heptullah cleared the Minister of all blame saying the Opposition had misunderstood the remark. But shortly after the discussion resumed, and it was Mr Kapil Sibal's (Congress) turn to speak, another prolonged argument broke out.

This time, it was over his ascribing to a RSS source some defamatory remarks about Bhagat Singh and Rajguru.

When the BJP's T.N. Chaturvedi and B. P. Singhal protested saying the publisher was not a RSS, Mr Sibal stuck to his stand. In the din, that lasted over an hour, members traded charges and prevented the discussion from going on.

A remark by Mr Chaturvedi, asking the Deputy Chairperson to adjourn the House once again as she had set such a precedent only earlier in the day, Mrs Heptullah rose, adjourned the House till tomorrow and stormed out.

The Home Minister, Mr L. K. Advani, who sat through the afternoon expecting to get a chance to reply to the discussion, ended up wasting his time. This "short-duration" discussion has already taken up two whole afternoons, and three more speakers are on the deputy chairperson's list.

Sarma's killing exposes 'inactiveness' of VIP security □
Documents reveal Ulfa plan to mount 'Operation M' in Majuli

Ulfa plans to revive central publicity cell — Assam police mull refresher training course

FROM PULLOQK DUTTA

Jorhat, March 1: The Ulfa is planning to set up its central communication centre at Majuli.

The centre, which was earlier located in Guwahati, had been busted a couple of months ago.

This was revealed during the interrogation of two central committee members, who were arrested by the Jorhat police from the Neemati ferry ghat, which connects the world's largest riverine island to the mainland.

The duo, Aditya Baruah alias Bhaskar Dutta and Samiran Bhuyan alias Rituraj, were later killed in a "cross-fire" between the police and the Ulfa in Nagaland on Monday.

The duo was leading a police team to a Ulfa camp in Nagaland's Mokokchung district bordering Jorhat district in Assam when the militants opened fire. The slain rebels allegedly sent to Majuli by Ulfa commander-in-chief Paresh Baruah to reorganise the outfit. Several computer floppies were recovered from them.

Once a hotbed of Ulfa activity, Majuli hit the headlines after social worker Sanjoy Ghose was abducted and killed by the outfit.

The killing had an adverse impact on the outfit's image and it lost much of its clout in the island. Majuli recorded 77 per cent polling despite the Ulfa's boycott call and the seat was retained by the AGP.

Moreover, politicians, who were on the outfit's hit list, cam-

paigned vigorously and some of them even stayed in the remote areas without security.

Security forces attribute Ulfa's plan to revive its operations in Majuli to the suspension of counter-insurgency operations in Jorhat district, of which Majuli is a sub-division.

The island's topography provides safe hideouts and easy escape routes should the outfit come under pressure from security forces, they added.

Documents recovered from the duo's possession revealed that the Ulfa has codenamed the proposed strikes as "Operation M".

The operation is "aimed" at eliminating several surrendered militants, specially one Montu Nath. He surrendered before the Golaghat police recently.

What lends credence to the police findings is the warning issued by the outfit last month to its former cadre to return all that they took with them (arms or cash) while deserting it.

However, sources here did not rule out the possibility of "M" implying a minister's elimination.

State Forest and PWD minister Nagen Sarma was killed in a blast triggered by the Ulfa in Nalbari district on February 27.

Cold wave: Sikkim and the neighbouring Darjeeling Hills continues to reel under severe coldwave conditions, reports UNI.

Gloomy skies, icy winds and intermittent rain continue to keep the mercury hovering around freezing point.

FROM SIDDHARTHA DUTTA KASHYAP

Guwahati, March 1: Humiliated by its dismal performance in countering sudden militant strikes, the Assam police is contemplating a refresher course for its personnel.

State PWD and forest minister Nagen Sarma was killed in an Ulfa ambush at Nij Barinjani in Lower Assam's Nalbari district on February 27.

While one of his personal security officers died on the spot, the rest of the security personnel in three escort vehicles failed to retaliate.

There are instances aplenty. State revenue minister Zoi Nath Sarma had a providential escape when Ulfa militants attacked his convoy on the banks of the Brahmaputra near Mangaldoi in Darrang district last year. Four people, including three personal security officers accompanying the minister were killed. The others failed to retaliate.

Ulfa militants targeted state veterinary minister Hiranya Konwar's convoy in Nagaon district on his way to the city. Konwar's security personnel failed to retaliate and fled the spot, while the minister saved himself by hiding under roadside bushes.

State municipal administration minister Biraj Kumar Sarma also survived an assassination bid on February 10, 1998 when motorcycle-borne Ulfa rebels fired at him with AK-56 rifles from point blank range.

Two of his bodyguards died

while another two were seriously injured. They could not return fire.

Chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta had a miraculous escape when Ulfa militants tried to blow up his car near the Kamakhya temple on June 7, 1997.

His security guards could not apprehend the rebels who detonated a remote control device from near the site.

The entire police department has come under fire for its failure to react "positively" to attacks by militant outfits.

Admitting that the personal security officers (PSOs) and other security personnel accompanying the victims often get nervous and fail to challenge the militants, sources in the department told **The Telegraph** that orientation programmes were the key to overcoming "such inactiveness."

Despite being armed with sophisticated weapons and walkie-talkies, the personal security officers often fail to retaliate, giving ample scope to the attackers to complete their task.

Even the elite police ranger corps (PRCs), who are considered much more well-equipped than the PSOs in terms of training and alertness, have failed to retaliate.

Several top-ranking surrendered activists guarded by PRC personnel lost their lives in militant attacks.

"We have already launched orientation programmes like yoga to keep our men both mentally and physically fit," an official said adding that steps have been taken to get them trained by the Army.

THE TELEGRAPH

- 2 MAR 2000

Hazarika leads rally for peace

T- 2/3

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, March 1: Sangeet Natak Akademi chairman Bhuben Hazarika and other eminent artistes including Sonal Mansingh took part in a rally against terrorism organised by the city committee of the Asom Gana Parishad.

Agriculture minister Chandramohan Patowary, health minister Kamala Kalita, minister of state for sports and youth welfare Moidul Islam Bora also took part in the rally which started from the AGP headquarters in the city's Ambari area and ended in front of the Gauhati High Court after passing through Panbazar.

The processionists carried placards condemning the Ulfa for its senseless violence and for

Processionists denounce violence, liken Ulfa to 'Assamese villain'

playing into the hands of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence. Some placards equated the outfit with Badan Barphukan, a villain in Assamese history, who invited the Burmese to plunder the state.

Bodo plea

Bodo Sahitya Sabha president Bineswar Brahma, today appealed to all sections of the people to honour the decision taken by the literary body to accept the Devnagari script for the Bodo language. Addressing a Press conference here today, he said there should not be any contro-

versy over rejecting the Roman script in favour of Devnagari. "Our leaders demanded that the Roman script should not be allowed to remain a part of the Assamese mainstream. The state government tried to crush the demand with largescale atrocities," he said, adding that the movement for the introduction of the Roman script will always remain one of the high points of Bodo history.

He said the agreement reached with the Centre over the adoption of the Devnagari script was also important. For almost 24 years, the Bodos had been

taught the script and Bodo literature had flourished in Devnagari. The script has so far not posed any problems. On the other hand a change in the script at this moment may lead to a number of problems, he added.

Dismissing the National Democratic Front of Boroland's charge that the Devnagari script was being adopted under influence of the RSS, Brahma said, "Then what does the demand for the adoption of the Roman script imply?"

Brahma also said the Sahitya Sabha did not receive any funds from the Assam government or from the Bodoland Autonomous Council for the past two years. Stating that the organisation was facing a severe financial crunch, Brahma appealed to the people to raise at least Rs 1 crore.

THE TELEGRAPH

2 MAR 2000

END OF AN AFFAIR

Busting Ulfa hideouts the only solution

THREE days after the Assam chief minister declared his government's commitment to free people from a fear psychosis, militants killed his forest and PWD minister Nagen Sarma. Ironically, it was Mahanta who generated a fear psychosis by harping on inadequate security arrangements. With the surrender of over 1,000 Ulfa cadres since the army accepted the first group in 1998 and reports of people lynching militants, Dispur chose to believe that the tide had turned against the insurgents. But there has been no let-up in bloodshed. Innocent people being killed in isolated incidents — the administration has grown accustomed. Only when the ruling party has been grievously outraged has it reacted by calling a bandh — a wholly meaningless exercise — reminiscent of the disruption which became part of the AASU's six-year movement. What is ironical is that Sarma was said to have had easy access to the Ulfa leadership. It is not the first time the Ulfa has targeted political leaders for not keeping their promise to withdraw the army. Mahanta and his ministers have also had miraculous escapes. It is unfortunate that Nagen Sarma became the first victim. All this seems to suggest the AGP's honeymoon with Ulfa is finally over.

Ulfa leaders are not the type to be easily lured by governor Lt-Gen S K Sinha's offer of safe passage. The Army has been proved right that instead of trying to inspire confidence by such inducements it should have been allowed to hit them hard. It is time Delhi did something concrete, with the help of Bhutan and Bangladesh, to eliminate insurgent hideouts in those countries. It would be an insult to public intelligence to suggest that all districts are under normal administration. The law and order situation in the Barak Valley has been far from satisfactory, with militants or miscreants terrorising tea gardens, railway officials and contractors engaged in the conversion of the hill section lines. Dispur has failed in its duty to conduct elections to gram panchayats, dissolved in April 1997, which were to be held within six months. The Centre's threat to stop funds for rural schemes and Gauhati High Court orders have had little effect. How long will Dispur run this course? In the 12th and 13th parliamentary elections the ruling party drew a blank. The next assembly elections are due in April 2001. The prospects are grim.

THE STATESMAN

- 3 MAR 2000

RJD assured of Congress support

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI/PATNA, March 2. — The Congress leadership has assured the Rashtriya Janata Dal chief, Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav, of support in Bihar and will decide on joining the government after the vote of confidence is passed in the state Assembly.

A formal announcement of support by the Congress is expected only after the party president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, returns from her Madhya Pradesh tour tomorrow morning. Till late tonight, central leaders of the party were trying to convince Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee chief, Mr Sadanand Singh, about the

agreement reached with Mr Yadav.

Mr Yadav met members of the Congress Working Committee — Dr Manmohan Singh, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, Mr Madhavrao Scindia and the AICC general secretary in charge of Bihar, Mrs Mohsina Kidwai — in Delhi today. After a long discussion, the RJD was assured Congress support in Bihar, provided it accepted certain conditions. Which included the government's working towards forming a separate Jharkhand state, to be announced immediately in the state Assembly.

No formal decision was taken on the Congress' joining the government. Mr Yadav has pro-

posed giving the post of deputy chief minister to a Congressman, but party leaders said that joining the government should be kept open till the government successfully passed the trial of strength in the Assembly.

With the Congress agreeing to support the government, Mr Yadav is closer to forming a government in Bihar than the National Democratic Alliance, which has floated Mr Nitish Kumar as its chief ministerial candidate.

However, Mr Yadav still has to secure the support of Jharkhand MLAs as well as the Left bloc to be able to stake claim for forming the government.

The CPI(M), which fought the elections with the RJD, will be supporting the government, but the CPI, which fought independently, is yet to make up its mind about supporting the RJD.

Mr Yadav today met the CPI(M) general secretary, Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet, and reportedly spoke to him about getting support from the CPI. However, till tonight, the CPI has not changed its stand on not supporting an RJD government in Bihar.

Bihar Congress unhappy: Though the newly-elected MLAs of the Bihar Congress showed signs of falling in line with the party high command's

■ See BIHAR: page 6

BIHAR:

(Continued from page 1)

move to support the RJD, the rank and file of the party virtually threatened a revolt against the move.

Several senior Congress leaders had a meeting here to pressure the party high command against the "disastrous" move to "rescue" the Laloo-Rabri regime. Later, they said in a joint statement, "There is a genuine fear among the state Congressmen that a support to Mr Laloo Yadav and his RJD, on whatever condition, will drive the rank and file of the Congress to desperation, paving the way for the unfortunate and dangerous consequences, like breaking-up the party."

The statement was signed by the former BPCC chief Mr Lahtan Chaudhary, outgoing CLP leader Mr Ramashrya Prasad Singh, the party leader in the Legislative Council, Mr Umeshwar Prasad Verma, former Speaker of the state Assembly, Mr Shivchandra Jha, BPCC working presidents Mr Ram Jatan Sinha, Mr Dilleshwar Ram, Mrs Manorama Singh, former AICC general secretary, Ram Ratan Ram, BPCC general secretaries Mr Kirpanath Pathak and Mr Anil Sharma.

State unit leaders decided to convene a meeting of all Congressmen, former and present MLAs and MPs, district and block Congress presidents, PCC office-bearers and AICC members to decide their future course of action if the high command formally announces its support to the RJD. BPCC general secretary Mr Anil Sharma confirmed the meeting, saying: "The support to the RJD would decimate the Congress organisation in Bihar."

The newly-elected MLAs, however, stayed away from the meeting. Mr Sadanand Singh, elected from the Kahalgaon seat, said at a meeting of newly-elected MLAs, "We will be with the decision of the party high command."

Disgruntled Congress members have decided to sit on dharna before the statue of Indira Gandhi at the party headquarters at Sadakat Ashram to mount pressure on the high command against toeing the RJD line.

The "anti-Laloo" Congress leaders swung into action after signals from Delhi indicated that the party high command had made up its mind to support the RJD.

THE STATESMAN

- 3 MAR 2000

A day of high drama, passion and disappointment in Patna

RJD dharna turns violent

HT Correspondent
Patna, March 3

EVEN A Robert Ludlum novel could not match the suspense, drama and climax which was witnessed near the Patna Raj Bhawan hours before Nitish Kumar was sworn in as the Minister of Bihar today. It was a day of passion, disappointment, political intrigue and of course celebration as the change of guard came in at 5 pm.

The four hour show started at 11.30 am, soon after news reached 1 Anne Marg that the Governor had invited Mr Nitish to form the government. Immediately Laloo Prasad rushed to the Raj Bhawan to plead his case but returned within minutes deeply disappointed. Subsequently, a peeved Mr Yadav prompted his supporters to lay siege on Raj Bhawan.

At 12.30 pm, over 200 supporters including former ministers of the Rabri Government surrounded the entire Rajendra Chowk and sat on dharna in front of the two main gates of Raj Bhawan. The RJD started began shouting slogans targeting the 'biased' approach of the Governor.

The situation turned volatile at 1.30 pm when the car of two senior police officers, (DIG sec-

urity Sridhar Sharma and SP security Rajesh Chandra) was stopped by the RJD supporters at the right gate of Raj Bhawan. Both the police officers were heckled by the mob which also damaged the windscreen of the vehicle with a heavy blow. At exactly 1.50 pm, Ambassador of RJD entered the Raj Bhawan with the much-awaited letter of support of the Congress. The mood once again became upbeat and cries of "Laloo Rabri Zindabad; Sonia Gandhi Zindabad" rent the air. In the meantime, a team of over 100 Home Guards along with the Rapid Action Force reached the roundabout and took up position.

Nevertheless the dharna and sloganeering continued only to be interrupted once when Mr Yadav came out from Raj Bhawan at 2.20 pm without any 'good news' for his men.

The RJD supporters were hoping something would work out but there were no answers to their repeated 'whys'.

Finally DSP Jagdish Choudhary, announced in front of the RJD bosses that Mr Laloo Yadav had asked to lift the dharna. The administration suddenly changed roles and started making preparations for the new CM to arrive.

How Nitish managed the magic number

Udayan Nambodiri
New Delhi, March 3

SAMATA PARTY sources here claimed tonight that Mr Nitish Kumar had succeeded in mustering the numbers by splitting three political parties before making his bid for forming the Government in Bihar. Details of this along with the support of 12 Independents have reportedly been passed on to the Governor by way of "firm proof".

"The Governor has acted with responsibility and in time the proof will come out", Ms Jaya Jaitly, Samata Party president told *The Hindustan Times* tonight.

Mr Sadanand Singh, confirming his telephonic chat with the Governor. Officially too, the party reacted sharply to Mr Pande's decision. Accusing him of "acting in haste", Mr Mukherjee and Ms Kidwai insisted that the gubernatorial invitation to Mr Nitish Kumar would encourage the "politics of horse trading and manipulation."

Rejecting suggestions that the party leadership wasted precious time in the face of a mounting political uncertainty in Bihar, Mr Mukherjee argued that the Governor should have waited for the Congress' missive before making up his mind.

It's normal parliamentary practice, he averred, to bring on record the individual views of parties having a presence in a hung State Legislature. "There was no delay on our part. Only the Governor who was in a hurry," added Ms Kidwai. She pointed out that the new House was notified only on Wednesday and the Congress was ready, with a common minimum programme signed by the two sides, by Thursday afternoon.

Releasing copies of the 8-point CMP, Mr Mukherjee said instead of calling the Congress for consultations, the Governor "chose to ignore the very clear message we had conveyed to him last night". But he couldn't explain as to why the letter the party faxed to Mr Pande this afternoon wasn't sent last night itself by way of abundant precaution.

The answer to the query worth the Government in Bihar lies in Mrs Gandhi's absence from Delhi. The story could perhaps have been different had Mrs Gandhi, under intense flak these days for her leadership of the Congress, returned to Delhi yesterday instead of spending the night in Khajuraho.

Clearly shocked by the turn of events, senior Congress leaders, who until last night were maintaining that the party's stand would require Mrs Sonia Gandhi's endorsement upon her return from Madhya Pradesh, were at pains to explain that they had sounded the Governor out on Thursday itself about their "principled" decision to back the RJD.

In fact, the Congress' stand was conveyed to Mr Pande at around 9.15 PM by BPPC chief Sadanand Singh following the second round of consultations with RJD chief Laloo Yadav. Also present in Dr Mannohan Singh's office in Parliament House at that time were Mr Madhavrao Scindia, Mr Pranab Mukherjee and Ms Mohsina Kidwai besides Mr Yadav and his co-interlocutor, Mr S R Bommai of the JD (U).

If a senior CWC member's account of the conversation is correct, the Governor did not set any deadline for the receipt of Congress' support letter. Upon being told that a formal communication would reach him the next day, he merely inquired as to who all were present in the room from where Mr Sadanand Singh had called him.

"The Governor has neither been fair nor Constitutionally correct. But there will be no split in the CLP. We will vote for defeating Nitish Kumar on the floor of the Assembly," remarked



Opposition leaders talking to the Press after meeting the President on Bihar issue. Photo: Anvind Yadav

BJP justifies Governor's action

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 3

BHARATIYA JANATA Party (BJP) has said that Bihar Governor Vinod Pande invited the NDA leader Nitish Kumar to form the Government only after he was convinced of the combined strength of the Alliance and its other supporters.

Describing the Governor's action as "well within the ambit of the Constitution and following the precedents", the party spokesperson M. Venkatalakshmi Naidu said that Mr Kumar was invited to form the Government as the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and its ally CPI-M had failed to muster the required strength of legislators to convince the Governor. The Congress as usual dithered and failed to take a timely decision to support the RJD due to serious differences within the party.

Strongly defending the Governor's decision to invite Mr Kumar to form the Government he said that Mr Pande had a crucial duty to perform in view of the fact that no political party or the alliance had a clear majority.

The two options available to the Governor were to first explore the possibility of installing a stable

Government which he successfully achieved or else put the Assembly under suspended animation, Mr Naidu added.

Replying to a query, he said that out of the two claimants to power, the NDA had a "firm and settled" support while the RJD combine was busy arriving at post poll adjustments to garner the required strength. Under the circumstances, the Governor followed the established tradition to invite the NDA to form the Government, he felt.

Mr Naidu criticised the Congress for exhibiting the "worst kind of political opportunism" in deciding to support the RJD in Government formation under the "sham" commitment to secularism.

The party leadership had gone back from its commitment made to the people of Bihar during election-eering that the Congress would never again support the RJD and had made even promised to order a probe into charges of corruption against Laloo Prasad Yadav and his party, if voted to power, he pointed out.

The BJP leader admitted that the people of Bihar have not given a clear mandate to any party or pre-poll alliance. However, their verdict was clearly a rejection of the RJD Government's policies, he claimed.

Sonia's absence costs RJD dear

Vinod Sharma
New Delhi, March 3

ON THE Bihar front, the Congress today seemed to be locking the stable door after the horse had bolted. Its letter of support for the RJD was transmitted to Governor V C Pande after the latter had invited the NDA to form the Government.

Clearly shocked by the turn of events, senior Congress leaders, who until last night were maintaining that the party's stand would require Mrs Sonia Gandhi's endorsement upon her return from Madhya Pradesh, were at pains to explain that they had sounded the Governor out on Thursday itself about their "principled" decision to back the RJD.

In fact, the Congress' stand was conveyed to Mr Pande at around 9.15 PM by BPPC chief Sadanand Singh following the second round of consultations with RJD chief Laloo Yadav. Also present in Dr Mannohan Singh's office in Parliament House at that time were Mr Madhavrao Scindia, Mr Pranab Mukherjee and Ms Mohsina Kidwai besides Mr Yadav and his co-interlocutor, Mr S R Bommai of the JD (U).

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"The Governor has neither been fair nor Constitutionally correct. But there will be no split in the CLP. We will vote for defeating Nitish Kumar on the floor of the Assembly," remarked

BIHAR GOVERNOR'S DECISION EVOKES PROTESTS

Nitish Kumar sworn in CM

By K. Balchand

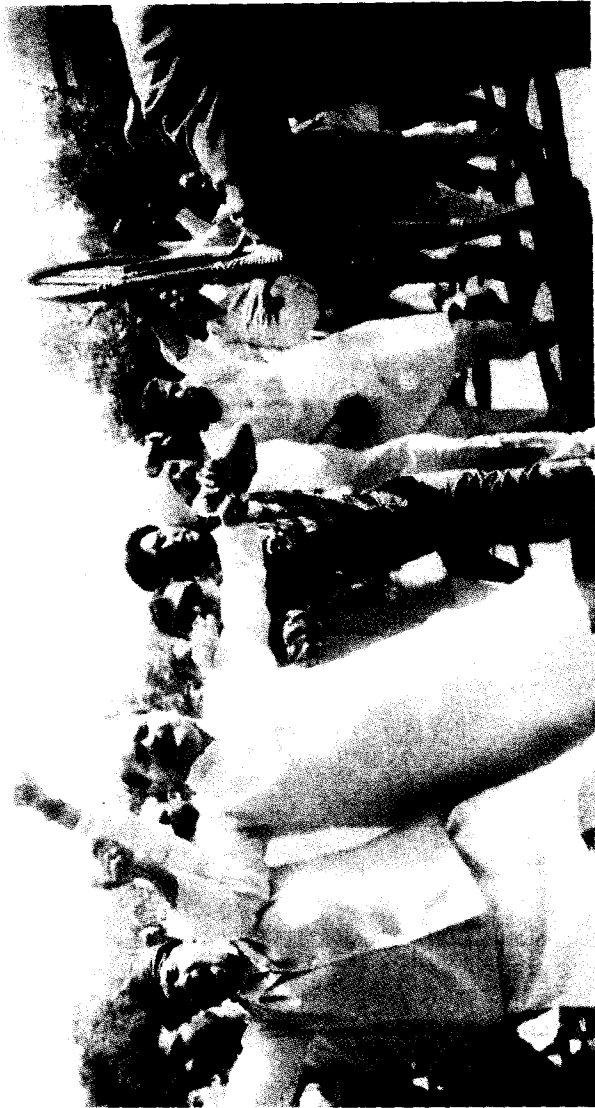
PATNA, MARCH 3. The Samata Party leader, Mr. Nitish Kumar, was today sworn in as the Chief Minister of Bihar by the Governor, Mr. V. C. Pande, in a move which evoked widespread criticism. The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), the Congress (I) and the CPI(M) sharply attacked the Governor and threatened to launch a Statewide agitation. The RJD has given a call for a Bihar bandh on March 5.

It was a day of high drama and even the NDA leaders, who looked despondent till Thursday night, were "surprised" by Mr. Pande's decision to extend all on a sudden the invitation to Mr. Kumar and administer the oath of office within hours of his decision without going through the motion of establishing which of the two contenders for the post — Mr. Kumar or Mrs. Rabri Devi of the RJD — actually enjoyed greater support.

Interestingly, much as he extended the time of oath-taking today, the Governor revised the deadline he had set for Mr. Kumar to prove his majority on the floor of the House — from seven days to 10 days.

At no point did the Governor seek any information from either Mrs. Rabri Devi or Mr. Kumar; nor did he ever convey any of his doubts or suspicions regarding their claims. The RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav and husband of Mrs. Rabri Devi, charged the Governor with not even setting a deadline to the two contenders to prove their claims.

While the Bahujan Samaj Party submitted its letter of support to the RJD on Thursday, the Congress (I) too had telephonically communicated to the Governor of its support to the RJD and prom-



Supporters of the RJD protesting outside the Raj Bhavan in Patna on Friday against the Governor's decision to invite Mr. Nitish Kumar to form the Government. — Photo: Ranjeet Kumar

ised to furnish him with the necessary papers the first thing on Friday. Mrs. Rabri Devi this morning submitted her list of 161 MLAs. That meeting was followed by another one when Mrs. Rabri Devi and Mr. Yadav together called on the Governor. Yet they were not invited and were taken aback when, around 11.15 a.m., the Governor extended the invitation to Mr. Kumar, who claimed the support of just 151 MLAs.

The Governor's action defied logic in that he waited for two days and then called on a party which failed to demonstrate that it had more support than the rival party. If he was convinced of the NDA's claim, observers said, he could very well have taken the decision on Wednesday last when the rival contenders had staked their claim to form the Govern-

ment. At that point of time, at least the NDA claimed the support of 146 MLAs while the RJD stressed on its strength as the single largest party and as the largest entity.

The RJD, the CPI(M) and the Congress(I) questioned the Governor's role, charging him with acting on the orders of the Prime Minister. The RJD legislators gathered outside the Raj Bhavan and demonstrated accusing him of "murdering democracy" and acting as an "agent of the BSS".

Mr. Laloo Yadav dashed to the Raj Bhavan twice — first when he learnt of the Governor's action

Opposition memorandum to President, more photos on Page 12

and later to submit the Congress (I)'s formal communique. He alleged that the Governor maintained a stony silence. Also, the Governor had not consulted any political party about their support, nor had he verified the signatures of the independents whose support the NDA had claimed. Mr. Yadav presented two independents who claimed their signatures had been forged by the NDA by two to 149.

Even as hundreds had gathered outside the Raj Bhavan to protest, there were protests elsewhere too with highways being blocked and trains delayed. Some of the protesters at the Raj Bhavan momentarily turned violent and attacked a police vehicle coming out of it.

Mr. Nitish Kumar said he would expand his Cabinet soon but did not specify a time-frame.

Nitish sworn in, Governor sworn at

NDA still short by 11, Opp at President's door

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA/NEW DELHI, March 3. — NDA-appointed Bihar Governor Mr Vinod Chandra Pande today stunned the entire Opposition by inviting Mr Nitish Kumar — still 11 short in the 322-member Assembly — to form an NDA government a few hours before the Congress submitted its letter of support to the RJD, and swore in Mr Kumar as the new Chief Minister.

Mr Kumar has been given 10 days to prove his majority on the floor of the House. Only Mr Kumar was sworn in today, others will follow later. After taking oath, he said he had submitted a list of 151 MLAs to the Governor. "More MLAs have joined us and are also joining us." He was confident of winning a trust vote.

The new CM immediately sprang into action, bringing back Mr Vijay Shanker Dubey as Chief Secretary, replacing Mr SN Biswas.

RJD chief Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav met the Governor and lodged protest against the decision. He, along with his supporters, sat on dharna near the Raj Bhavan. "The communal BJP has strangled democracy in full view of people," he growled. "The Governor deserves to be kicked out."

The RJD has called a Bihar bandh on 5 March in protest against the "illegitimate installation" of the Nitish Kumar government. Protests and dharnas have been planned all

over the state from tomorrow.

All non-NDA parties, including the Congress, CPM, CPI and the CPI ML-Liberation, stayed away from the swearing-in ceremony.

In Delhi, Opposition parties demanded that Mr Pande be restrained from installing an



Laloo: 'kick out Pande'

NDA government in Bihar. In a memorandum to the President this evening, Opposition leaders said Mr Kumar did not have a majority and the Governor's step could set off a bout of horse trading.

Mr Pranab Mukherjee alleged that democracy had been throttled in Bihar at the Centre's behest and the President, as a custodian of the Constitution, should intervene.

Later at a Press conference, the RJD chief presented five Independent MLAs and their letters of support to Mrs Rabri Devi. Mr Yadav and the state Congress vice-president, Mr

Radhanandan Jha, who was present at the Press conference, said Mr Pande administered the oath despite the fact that the RJD had submitted a list of 161 MLAs, against only 151 of the NDA. Mr Jha echoed the sack-Governor demand.

Independent MLA Mr Ravindra Mishra whose name figures in the NDA list to the Governor, but was curiously present at Mr Laloo Yadav's Press meet, said he was surprised to learn that his signature figured in NDA's list. "The Governor should have given me an opportunity to clarify my position... my signature has been forged by the NDA."

Mr Yadav said the Bihar PCC president had rung up the Governor from the chamber of Congress leader Mr Manmohan Singh in New Delhi last night to communicate that his party would support RJD. The Governor was told that the Congress would submit its support letter today. "We are surprised why Mr Pande did not wait for the letter," Mr Yadav said.

Apart from a list of 161 members that Mr Yadav says he had submitted, he said the CPI and the CPI ML-Liberation together have 11 MLAs, who would vote against the confidence motion to bring down the new government.

BSP leader Mr Kanshi Ram criticised the move, alleging "bias and vendetta" on part of the Governor.

■ Both Houses adjourned:
page 6

THE STATESMAN
- 4 MAR 2009

15 ULFA militants surrender in Nagaon

Guwahati, March 4

A GROUP of 15 ULFA ultras laid down their arms before the authorities at Dhing in Nagaon district yesterday, officials here said.

The surrendered ultras included local unit organising secretary Dipak Bora and assistant organising secretary Narain Nath.

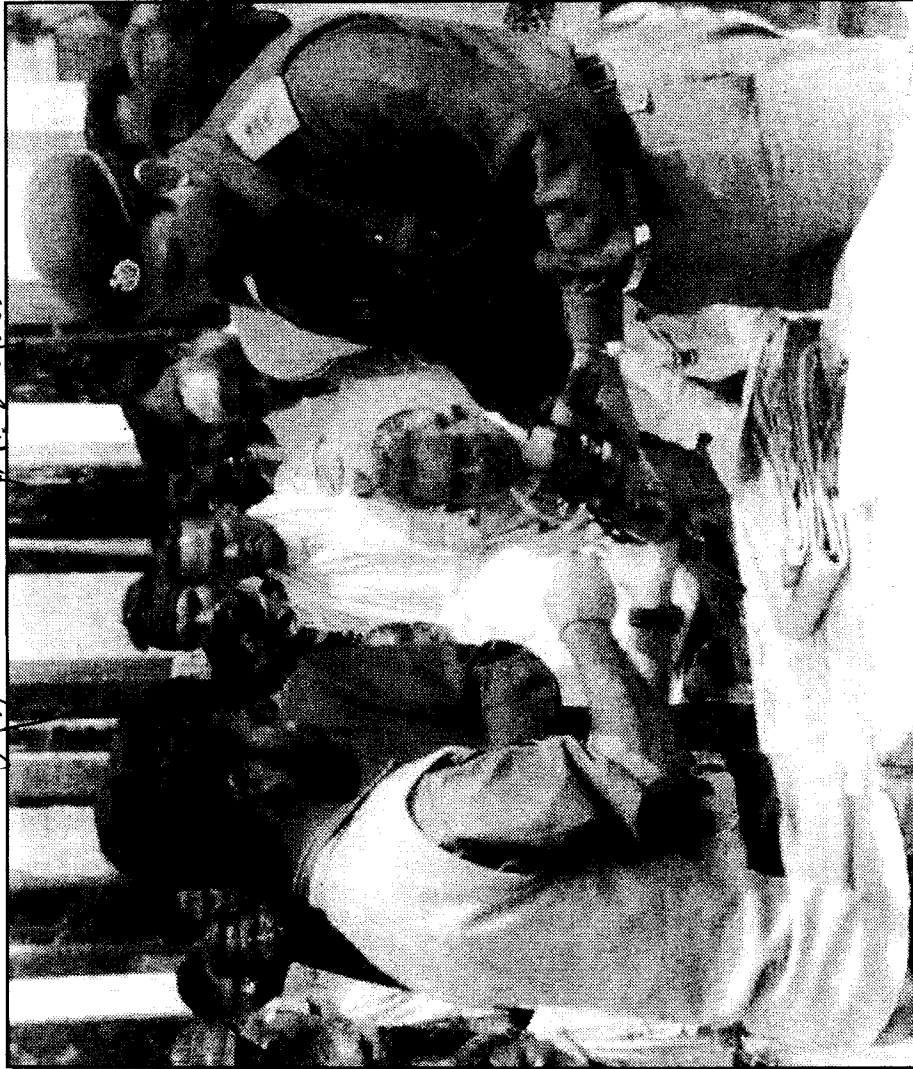
The militants laid down their arms in front of a large gathering that included many prominent personalities, police said.

The Unified Command, operating against the extremists in Assam, has urged the people not to be mute spectators to the atrocities committed by outlawed ULFA, NDFB or any insurgent organisation.

Criticising the 'cowardly act' of ULFA, which led to the death of Public Works Department and Forest Minister Nagen Sarma in Nalbari on February 27, the Command said, "the responsibility has been claimed by self-styled commander-in-chief of the banned organisation, Paresh Baruah," a Defence release issued here said.

It was learnt that ULFA cadres had been asked to carry out blasts in public places in Guwahati and other towns. The Command warned the people to be vigilant against any suspicious item and report to the authorities.

(UNI)



One of fifteen hardcore ULFA militants surrenders his automatic weapon to a police officer on Friday at the Nagaon district of Assam. Photo: AFP

LALOO THREATENS WEEK-LONG AGITATION

Railways targeted on bandh eve

By K. Balchand

PATNA, MARCH 4. Widespread protests by RJD supporters today disrupted rail and road traffic in a big way, even as the Left and democratic forces were seemingly making common cause in pursuance of their demand for the removal of the Governor, Mr. V.C. Pande, for his alleged unconstitutional action of appointing Mr. Nitish Kumar as Chief Minister.

The Governor's action, which evoked sharp reactions on Friday when RJD supporters protested before the Raj Bhavan, took a violent turn today ahead of the call given by the RJD, the CPI(M) and the Congress(I) for a Bihar bandh tomorrow. This coincides with the CPI(ML)'s call for a State bandh demanding the removal of the Governor as also the Chief Minister.

(According to PTI, an alert has been sounded throughout the State in view of the bandh call. The Chief Minister has asked the administration to "sternly deal with law-breakers and take extra security care to protect railway property.")

The movement of trains had been totally paralysed on the Howrah-Patna-Delhi and Patna-Gaya sectors and the Sonepur division. National Highways were affected by road blockades. NH 31 remained closed for over nine hours before it was reopened. Railway authorities were forced to cancel more than a dozen trains. The Howrah-bound Rajdhani Express has been stranded at Fatuah since morning.

The major protest was in and around the constituency that the Chief Minister represents — Barh. Demonstrators uprooted the railway track near Mokamah Halt, while fish-plates were removed at Khusrupur, Karaunta, Bakhtiar-pur and Pandarak. Railway signals were damaged at various places and the protesters tied their cattle-heads to railway tracks obstructing traffic.

Engines of two trains were detached at Bakhtiarpur and Parsa Bazar and driven away leaving the coaches behind. At the time of filing this report, several important



RJD activists staging a dharna in Patna on Saturday against the formation of the NDA Government in the State. PTI

trains, such as the Hingiri Express and the Howrah-Delhi Express, remain detained at various stations, where the RJD, CPI(M) and Congress(I) supporters staged demonstrations.

The Chief Minister described these actions as undemocratic and violent and warned that strong action would be taken if the situation did not normalise in a day or two. Mr. Kumar met senior officials, including the new Chief Secretary, Mr. V.S. Dubey, who took charge last night.

The RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, said the people's reaction was spontaneous. He said the agitation would be continued for at least a week. He said that a coordination committee would be set up to spearhead the movement against the "fascist and communal forces" out to undermine democracy in the country as a whole. "It is not just a question of the Rabri Devi Government any more," he added.

Rabri writes to Narayanan

The RJD Legislature Party leader, Mrs. Rabri Devi, has urged the President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, to immediately intervene and set aside the "arbitrary and unconstitutional" decision of the Gover-

nor. In a letter faxed to the President, Mrs. Devi said "being the custodian of the Constitution, Mr. Narayanan should immediately take steps to rescind the Governor's order."

Mr. Yadav said that the Governor had acted at the behest of the BJP-led Government at the Centre and had placed his so-called intellect at the feet of the RSS. The BJP had garlanded Mr. Kumar much like the sacrificial goat; his Government was a *bund* (small bridge) that was bound to fall, he said.

Nitish exudes confidence

On his part, the Chief Minister said he would convene the Assembly by March 7 and seek a vote of confidence by March 10. He exuded optimism about proving his majority. Mr. Kumar parried questions on the how he intended to bridge the shortfall, having procured the support of only 151 MLAs thus far. The minimum requirement for a simple majority is 162.

While Mr. Yadav has claimed the support of 161 MLAs, the task of the NDA becomes difficult with the CPI(ML), with six MLAs, deciding to vote against the motion. The CPI, which has kept itself

aloof from the bandh call, is likely to take a decision on the matter soon.

The Union Communications Minister, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, made no bones about the NDA's strategy stressing that both the BSP and the Congress(I) would split if they did not support the NDA on the floor of the House.

Kidwai meets Cong. MLAs

PTI reports:

AICC general secretary, Ms. Mohsina Kidwai, held a meeting with party leaders here in an apparent bid to placate them.

The BPC general secretary, Mr. Anil Sharma, said several PCC members expressed their view against the CWC decision to support the RJD "but there has been a consensus to abide by the direction of the high command." Ms. Kidwai later returned to Delhi.

However, party MLA, Ms. Veena Sahi, said "the whole party seems to be suffering from a death-wish syndrome. They want to commit suicide knowing full well that if we support the RJD, we are finished forever." She said if she had to make a choice between the NDA and RJD, she would choose the NDA.

Editorial on Page 8

Bandh today, trains held up, Rabri SOS to President

Laloo's men gear up to derail Nitish

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA, March 4. — In a pointer to the coming storm tomorrow — to be observed as Bihar bandh by Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav, the CPI and the CPI-ML (Liberation) — RJD workers today removed fish plates and dislocated tracks at 13 places in the Danapur division of Eastern Railway in protest against the installation of the Nitish Kumar government.

They squatted on tracks disrupting train services for hours at Fatuha, Khushrupur and Barauta on the Patna-Howrah section and at several places on the Patna-Gaya section.

Several long-distance trains were hampered by today's protests. The Howrah-bound Rajdhani Express, Toofan Express, Himgiri Express, Danapur Express and other trains were left stranded at different stations.

Northern Railways requested East-bound passengers to make inquiries about train schedules in view of the bandh. Trains likely to be affected include Magadh Express, Vaishali Express, Poorva Express, Janta Express, Brahmaputra Mail and Shramjivi Express, a spokesperson said, adds PTI.

The call that cost Bihar

NEW DELHI, March 4. — Mrs Sonia Gandhi did not think it necessary to meet Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav as she had already spoken to him over telephone. "Contented that she had played her part by speaking to the RJD chief over phone, Mrs Gandhi left to watch a cultural show at Khajuraho," said Congress sources. The Congress leaders entrusted to deal with the Bihar situation could not take a final decision till Mrs Gandhi arrived. — SNS

Mr Nitish Kumar warned: "Stern action will be taken against those who are damaging railway property. Nobody will be allowed to take law in his hands."

Elaborate security arrangements have been made for the dawn-to-dusk bandh. DGP Mr KA Jacob said adequate security arrangements had been made at sensitive pockets to avoid any untoward incident. Central paramilitary forces, including RAF, will also be deployed at sensitive areas, he said, adding that additional contingencies of CRPF had

been deployed, reports UNI.

Meanwhile, Mrs Rabri Devi today faxed a letter to the President urging him to set aside the "illegal" appointment of Mr Kumar as Chief Minister. She demanded the President recall the Governor, Mr VC Pandey, for his "unethical and illegal" decision to invite the NDA to form government.

Echoing her, Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav said Mr Pandey did not even verify the signature of some of the Independent MLAs whose support the NDA had claimed in its list.

But Mr Kumar sounded upbeat about provin majority. "I will show it on the floor of the House." He said Mr Yadav had the support of only 57 MLAs when he became Chief Minister for the first time in 1990. "If Laloo Yadav can rule the state, why can't I?"

Fissures appeared in the state Congress unit, with Congress MLA Ms Veena Shahi coming out strongly against the party's decision to support RJD, and described the move as "suicidal".

'Cong the villain': CPI leader Mr Chaturanan Mishra blames Congress more than the Governor for inviting Mr Kumar to form government.

■ Another report, page 10

Cong letter missed the bus

NALIN VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA, March 4. — Raj Bhavan got the Congress's letter of support for Mrs Rabri Devi after Mr Nitish Kumar was invited to form a government but before he was sworn in as Bihar chief minister, the BPCC chief has said.

Mr Sadanand Singh claimed to have informed the Governor from New Delhi on Thursday night that he would submit the letter of support the next day.

Mr Vinod Pande invited Mr Kumar to form a government, though the RJD was the largest single party, and had the support of more MLAs.

Mr Kumar has the support of 151 MLAs, 11 short of majority in the 322-member House. Mrs Rabri Devi claims the support of 161 MLAs. The RJD has 123 MLAs; CPI-M, 2; Congress, 23; BSP, 5 and KCP, 2. Six others

5/2/10
5/3
9-85 nylan
have pledged support to RJD.

Did Mr Pande invite Mr Kumar under pressure from the Centre? From where will Mr Kumar get the numbers?

Non-NDA parties have said Mr Pande's action was "unconstitutional and unethical". They've joined Mr Laloo Yadav in attacking the "biased and motivated" decision.

BJP leader Sushil Modi, however, defended Mr Pande: "Mr Yadav met Mr Pande at 9 a.m. yesterday and told him that the Congress would soon send its letter of support." But, it hadn't done so till 2 p.m."

With no side being able to say how it would manage a majority, did the Congress's delay constitute sufficient ground to invite Mr Kumar?

He can't survive the trust vote unless he splits the 23-member CLP and secures the breakaway faction's support. The CPI, CPI-ML (Liberation)

and CPI-ML (TND) have 12 MLAs, certain to vote against the motion. And if the Congress keeps its flock together, Mr Kumar's fall is a certainty.

Mr George Fernandes, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan, Mr Sushil Kumar Modi and Mr Nitish Kumar are reportedly working overtime to split the Congress. But the AICC general secretary, Mrs Mohsina Kidwai, is in Patna to foil the "enemies at work to break our party".

"Those who think they can split the Congress are living in a fool's paradise," Mr Sadanand Singh said.

BPCC general secretary Shakil-uz-Zaman said: "Mr Pande will have to leave Raj Bhavan the same way as Mr SS Bhandari after he failed to impose President's rule in 1998."

Maybe, maybe not. But if Mr Kumar loses the trust vote, Mr Pande will certainly have some explaining to do.

THE STATESMAN
- 5 MAR 2000

TWO KILLED AS BIHAR BANDH TURNS VIOLENT

Laloo arrested, vows to continue struggle

By K. Balchand

PATNA, MARCH 5. A Rashtriya Janata Dal activist was killed when the RJD-sponsored Bihar bandh against the "unconstitutional" installation of Mr. Nitish Kumar as the Chief Minister by the Governor, Mr. V. C. Pande, turned violent today. The RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, along with several supporters, was arrested for violating prohibitory orders.

Police opened fire to clear a blockade put up at the northern end of the Mahatma Gandhi bridge across the Ganga in Vaishali district killing an RJD supporter. Another RJD activist was killed on Saturday night when police opened fire to clear a blockade at Maner. Police also fired at Kachhi Dargha on the Patna-Mokamah road to disperse a crowd of bandh supporters. One person was injured in the firing.

The call for the bandh had been given jointly by the RJD, the CPI (M) and the Congress (I), while the CPI(ML) gave a separate bandh call so as not to affect the secondary examinations scheduled to begin on Monday. The Government, however, put off the examinations by a week.

Several trains cancelled

Almost all the railway divisions in the State as well as the national highways continued to be affected with the Howrah-Patna-Delhi section paralysed for the second day in succession. It was no different in north Bihar where traffic on the Howrah-Chapra, Howrah-Muzaffarpur and the Darbhanga-



The RJD chief, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, leading a protest march in Patna on Sunday during the one-day Bihar bandh. Photo: Ranjeet Kumar.

Purnea sections was disrupted after fish plates on the track were removed.

Engines detached, coach set ablaze

A coach of the Tata-Patna express was set ablaze near Bakhtiarpur and at least four Railway Police Force jawans suffered burns when they tried to extinguish the fire. A couple of trains were derailed and the engines detached. Several trains were cancelled and a few suspended.

also dishonoured the people's verdict, he said and claimed that the bandh was successful.

The Chief Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar, termed the bandh a flop and said the Government would take action against the guilty.

3 more Ministers included

Earlier in the day, the Chief Minister inducted the BJP legislature party leader, Mr. Sushil Kumar Modi, the JD(U) leader, Mr. Pashupati Kumar Paras, brother of the Union Minister, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, and the JMM(S) leader, Mr. Stephen Marandi, into his Cabinet.

Mr. Kumar said he would expand his Cabinet again after the vote of confidence on March 9. His move was apparently to take the JMM into confidence by inducting one of its members into the Cabinet. The JMM president, Mr. Shibu Soren, may be included in the Central Government.

The NDA's strategy during the confidence vote would become clear from the tactics it adopts for the Speaker's election which will precede it. Mr. Kumar said he would strive for a consensus for the post. He might have kept his options open knowing well that his fate would be decided on March 9 itself. The victory of his nominee would mean his victory not only on the day of the Speaker's election but this own the following day.

Fernandes' optimism: Page 13

Laloo's turnaround on Jharkhand, More photos on Page: 15

Claims, counter-claims on Bihar Congress

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 5. Even as the Samata Party today claimed that the Congress(I) in Bihar was on the verge of a "split" with one group planning to support the National Democratic Alliance Government during the vote of confidence later this week, the Congress(I)'s central leadership here declared that there was no threat to its unity.

The party's 23 MLAs in the Bihar Legislative Assembly were "fully intact", said Ms. Mohsina Kidwai, AICC general secretary in charge of Bihar and CWC member. She visited Patna on Saturday.

"Not a single MLA would cross over and there is no question of a split in the Congress", Ms. Kidwai said.

The Samata Party president, Ms. Jaya Jaitly, however, was equally confident that the bulk of the Congress(I)'s local flock

would desert the party and support the Nitish Kumar Government. She denied that her party was trying to break the Congress(I) and said the real reason for the tremors in its State unit was the central leadership's decision to support Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal.

Ms. Jaitly said the Bihar Congress(I) leaders had reacted strongly to the decision as they knew that supporting Mr. Laloo Yadav amounted to committing political suicide. The Congress(I) central leadership was not in tune with the "ground realities", and the "memorandum of understanding" between New Delhi and Mr. Yadav had not impressed the state leadership.

She claimed that even some central Congress(I) leaders were privately happy at the turn of events in Bihar as they were not enthusiastic about supporting Mr. Yadav. There was also speculation that the delay by the Con-

gress(I) in formally announcing support to the RJD was "deliberate."

Ms. Jaitly repeatedly emphasised that the NDA Government in Bihar was not banking on any one party or group. "We are hopeful of getting support from all sections", she said but declined to identify them. She was "certain" that Mr. Nitish Kumar would prove his majority in the Assembly.

The Congress(I) defended its decision to support Mr. Yadav saying that it was in line with its policy to keep the "communal forces" at bay. Asked about the threat of revolt held out by some of the party MLAs over the issue of support to the RJD, Ms. Kidwai said she had spoken to all the senior leaders in Bihar and "each and every MLA" and they did not pose any threat to the party's unity.

Claiming that there was no delay in the Congress(I) decision on

supporting the RJD, she alleged that the Bihar Governor had acted hastily and had already made up his mind on inviting the NDA to form the Government.

"As the constitutional head in the State, the Governor has unfortunately acted in a most unconstitutional manner," she said.

Mrs. Kidwai cited the example of the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, who had waited for three days for the letter of support to the Vajpayee-led coalition from the AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha. "The Bihar Governor could have waited for 24 hours but he had already made up his mind to invite Mr. Nitish Kumar and our decision of extending support even if made couple of hours earlier would not have made any difference," she said.

She alleged that the Centre had unleashed "dictatorship" and was sidelining all principles of secularism.

Assam minister survives attempt on life

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SR-1
6/3

GUWAHATI, March 5. — Terrorists, probably the Ulfa, struck at a second Assam minister in a week, but Mr Hiranya Konwar survived the remote-controlled explosion.

The minister of state for the veterinary and power departments had just set off from Rangali Deogharia, Sibsagar, at 1.30 p.m. when the blast blew off the lid of his car's boot and shattered the rear window pane.

"Fortunately the car, which was new, weathered the blast and we continued with the journey till we met a CRPF patrol," Mr Konwar told The Statesman over telephone from the Sibsagar circuit house.

After the blast, the guerrillas rained bullets on the five-car convoy and the policemen accompanying Mr Konwar fired back, the minister said. "But none of us was injured."

In the car were Mr Rohini Chetia, president of the AGP's Charaideo unit; Mr Bipin Handique, Asom Yuba Parishad leader; the driver and the minister's personal security officer.

Last Sunday, a blast killed state forest and PWD minister Nagen Sharma and four others in Nalbari district. As the Ulfa claimed responsibility, it threatened more attacks on ministers.

Mr Konwar said he had been to Rangali Deogharia — in his constituency Mahmara — to attend the shraddha of a party worker, Diganta Bezboruah, who died a month ago in an accident.

"It was a *mahekia* (after-a-month) shraddha and there was a public meeting too.

"The blast occurred a short distance from Bezboruah's home on our return journey. The bomb was planted on the *kuchcha* road."

It was a planned visit and the route was heavily guarded, but "somehow they (security personnel) failed to detect the bomb".

This was the third attempt on Mr Konwar. He survived one by Naga terrorists in Golaghat in 1996. Two years later came an attack by the Ulfa.

The cadres fired at his car from automatic weapons near Nagaon, but Mr Konwar managed to crawl out and hide himself in a roadside ditch till the attackers left.

Today's attack was similar to one that killed Nagen Sharma: bombs planted on the road and set off through remote control. The Ulfa hadn't claimed responsibility till tonight, but police suspect the outfit because it wields some influence in the area.

"If the Ulfa thinks it can achieve anything by targeting ministers, it is mistaken," Mr Sharma said.

THE STATESMAN

- 6 MAR 2000

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Manipur restriction on refugees

Myanmarese seek President's help

9-11-88 state 9-5-88 news

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE 5/2

GUWAHATI, March 5. — The All Burma Students' League has appealed to the President, Mr KR Narayanan, to allow Myanmarese refugees in Manipur to stay at places other than the camp at Leikun in Chandel district.

The appeal was made after the Manipur government ordered its police to ensure that all Myanmarese refugees stayed at Leikun where a camp had been established for them in 1988. An order was issued last month after it was found that some refugees had started staying at other places like Moreh and Churachandpur. The decision was taken to avoid "complicity".

Talking to reporters here today, the ABSL vice-president, Mr Kyaw Than, said it was difficult for them to continue their struggle for restoration of democracy in Myanmar from the designated camp for refugees located in a remote jungle. "It is difficult to maintain contact with the outside world from there," he said.

6/3
Mr Than also expressed concern over an earlier order of the Manipur government to arrest one Maung Nyo and hand him over to the Myanmarese government. "It is as good as awarding him death penalty," he said, adding such an act would have a serious impact on the movement for democracy in Myanmar.

There are about 60 student refugees in Manipur, while over a hundred stayed in Delhi.

"We can only turn to India for help for bringing back democracy in our country," Mr Than, who has been in the country since 1988, said. "Unfortunately, despite being the largest democracy in the world, India has not helped us much in our efforts. There has been more lip service than anything else." He, however, acknowledged that it was kind of India to allow the refugees to stay in the country. "But we need more help to achieve our objective."

The student leader said if India leaders thought it could get close to the military rulers of his country, they were mistaken. "The rulers will not do

anything to displease the Chinese." Mr Than said the Myanmar junta's efforts to flush out Indian militants from its soil were only a "show".

"The area where Naga and other insurgents from India are taking shelter in Myanmar is very remote and it would be very expensive for the military to keep its forces there," he said. "Once they go back the insurgents can return."

According to some reports, at least 30 militants belonging to the NSCN-K, Uifa and the People's Liberation Army (a Manipur outfit) have been killed in recent weeks following a flushing-out operation by the Myanmarese army.

Mr Than, who has no contact with his family since he fled to India, said years of military rule (since 1962) in his country had seen establishment of an intelligence system which kept constant watch on the people.

"Any stirring against the rulers is dealt with harshly and, more often than not, without trial." In the circumstances, it was difficult for the people to rise against the junta.

THE STATESMAN

- 6 MAR 2000

Lyngdoh to quit as Meghalaya CM

SR-5
7/3

✓

DIPANKAR ROY
STATESMAN NEW SERVICE

GUWAHATI, March 6. — Mr BB Lyngdoh today offered to quit as Meghalaya chief minister and leader of the UDP parliamentary party, and named the Speaker of the Assembly, Mr EK Mawlong, as his successor.

The Meghalaya home (police) minister, Mr AH Scott Lyngdoh, told The Statesman from Shillong tonight that the chief minister offered to quit at a meeting of the United Democratic Party parliamentary party held earlier in the evening.

Mr Lyngdoh is likely to hand over a letter formally relinquishing charge as leader of the parliamentary party and chief minister to the Governor tomorrow, Mr Scott Lyngdoh said.

Mr BB Lyngdoh is reported to have said that he would quit the party as well, and join a "good national party".

Mr Scott Lyngdoh said the chief minister's decision to step down was a result of "growing realisation within the party that a more effective leadership was the need of the hour." The minister has been quoted as saying on an earlier occasion that what Mr BB Lyngdoh really needs is "a tot of whisky and a good night's sleep".

Mr Scott Lyngdoh said this evening's meeting was convened by Mr BB Lyngdoh him-

self. "He was gracious in announcing his decision," the home (police) minister said, adding that whatever happened today was keeping in mind the Assembly session which begins on 16 March. Of the 20 UDP members, 18 attended today's meeting. Two were out of town.

Mr Scott Lyngdoh did not foresee any problem for the government as he did not believe that Mr Lyngdoh had the backing of enough legisla-

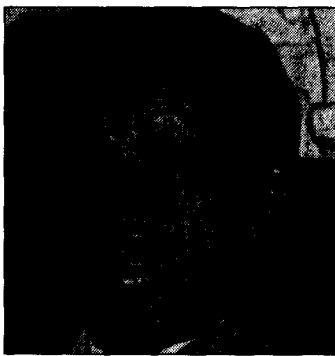
tors to strike out on his own. "Only the leader of the party and the chief minister will change, the government remains as it is," he said.

According to some Opposition members, the UDP parliamentary party today

voted against gerontocracy by prevailing upon Mr BB Lyngdoh to resign.

"There were reports that he had become very forgetful — even forgetting decisions he himself had taken," a senior Opposition leader said.

The axe would probably have fallen much earlier, but the UDP was uncertain about who should replace Mr Lyngdoh. "For a party which was never known for its cohesiveness, it needed someone who at least had been a chief minister in the past. And it was for this reason alone that Mr BB Lyngdoh had become the choice of the party," an observer said.



Mr BB Lyngdoh

Lyngdoh quits party post

Meghalaya govt in throes of political crisis

OUR BUREAU

Shillong, March 6: Chief minister B.B. Lyngdoh was today forced to relinquish the post of chairman and parliamentary party leader of the United Democratic Party (UDP). He failed to garner enough support at a crucial parliamentary party meeting this evening.

Speaker and party president E.K. Mawlong was elected UDP parliamentary party leader after the two-hourlong meeting.

But it is not immediately clear whether Mawlong will become chief minister within the next few days. Lyngdoh did not indicate he would be relinquishing the post but said he would leave the UDP.

Earlier in the day Lyngdoh had issued an order to UDP legislators not to attend the parliamentary party meeting. But he surprised everyone by turning up. He ended up chairing the meeting.

At a news conference later Lyngdoh said his resignation "had been accepted straightaway."

He added, "I will join a national party." Asked whether he would be leaving the chief minister's chair, he replied, "Naturally." But the next moment he indicated otherwise.

His colleagues told newsmen not to "take his statements seriously about the part on his joining a national party."

A UDP press statement said, "A parliamentary party held under the chairmanship of B.B. Lyngdoh accepted his offer to relinquish the office of the chairman and leader of the parliamentary party and unanimously elected E.K. Mawlong in his place."

A jubilant Mawlong told newsmen that he would meet Governor M.M. Jacob to apprise him of the change of guard in the UDP, the leading party in the ruling coalition. The UDP has 40 MLAs in-

cluding the chief minister. The UDP has been informally divided into two factions. Lyngdoh is said to be left with only five loyal MLAs at present.

Mawlong, along with BJP legislators and home minister T.H. Rangad, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) legislature party leader Lotsing A. Sangma and some UDP ministers had met Governor M.M. Jacob last evening to apprise him of the impending change in the state's leadership.

Lyngdoh has come in for a lot of flak for his failings — his old age, his forgetfulness and his indecisiveness. But what has irked party legislators the most is the

fact that he is at the mercy of his daughter and two businessmen, who are referred to as the "kitchen Cabinet" by the MLAs.

The tiny hill state of Meghalaya has witnessed a great deal of political flux after the elections on February 16, 1998. A Congress government under the leadership of Salseng C. Marak was sworn in on February 27,

1998. Marak was voted out of office on March 10, when he failed to prove his majority on the floor of the Assembly.

Lyngdoh was then asked to form the government.

The veteran UDP leader formed the Meghalaya Parliamentary Forum (MPF) government on March 10, 1998 with the support of the BJP, the Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party (HSPDP) and two Independent MLAs.

Australian offer: Australian High Commissioner Rob Laurie today met chief minister B.B. Lyngdoh and offered support for the development of Meghalaya.

Women's day: The Meghalaya State Social Welfare Advisory Board and the directorate of social welfare along with several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) will observe International Women's Day on Wednesday.



B.B. Lyngdoh:
Cornered

THE TELEGRAPH

- 7 MAR 2000

Unequal, invisible and full of fear

Human rights bodies are creating awareness of the customary laws that discriminate against the female victims of insurgency in the Northeast, writes **Sudipta Bhattacharjee**

The world will come to an end when the hen begins to crow", runs an old Khasi proverb. Every time rights bodies deliberate on women's empowerment, they cite the example of the matrilineal societies of the Northeast. Yet the presumption that right to property can guarantee a woman's exalted status cannot be further from the truth.

Over the years, the turbulent ground situation in the seven-sister states has, ironically, taken the greatest toll on women. In the perpetually militancy-ravaged zones, women comprise the bereaved and the surging number of rape victims. It is a bleak backdrop — that of nameless women living life on terms set by men and trying to forge a semblance of tactical survival while coping with unusual inheritance paradigms.

If the supposed economic independence of women among these tribes could have guaranteed even a nascent gender consciousness, perhaps many more of them would have joined mainstream politics or, at least, placed their needs on a political agenda. Even in Meghalaya, where women are considered more equal than their male counterparts, they are debarred from the *dorbars* the local administration.

Whenever confronted with this issue, Khasi veterans invariably fall back on the old dictum that women should not be heard — a hen should not crow — and therefore, stay out of politics, which is a "24-hour job". Thus, with minimal representation in the assembly, issues regarding women and youth are swept aside, resulting in growing resentment among these categories.

In the Northeast, the suffering of women is primarily the result of insurgency. They are forever caught in the anguish and apprehension of losing the breadwinner — father, brother or son. Every encounter brings its quot: of the

dead; if it is not a clash between the rebels and the armed forces, the toll is the result of ethnic or inter-factional feud.

The manifestation of violence finds myriad expressions in the torching of houses, extortions, atrocities and killings. Last year, the Union home ministry recorded 1,226 insurgency-related incidents, with 310 extremists, 171 security personnel and nearly 500 civilians losing their lives in the Northeast alone.

What goes unrecorded, however, are the hundreds of women widowed, teenage girls left destitute and at the mercy of predators, being forced into crime, prostitution or even insurgency.

But while it is true that the issue of military violence has drowned all other aspects of human rights violation in the Northeast, sociologists believe that the volatile situation also contributes in large measure to increasing violence on women. Either security personnel inflict atrocities on the pretext of these women being the kin of militants and their harbourers, or they fall prey to domestic violence unleashed by the frustration of being unemployed. In certain cases, women have enrolled as militants for want of a livelihood.

Unfortunately, even in matrilineal societies of this region, a woman's control over the purse strings does not shield her against battering, since socio-cultural norms and customary laws condone the indignities heaped on them.

Census figures and economic surveys have unveiled startling facts about the significantly lower literacy rates among women of these states, although the female work force partici-



Burden of terror

tion rate is much higher than the national average.

In Arunachal Pradesh, for instance, the literacy rate for men is 51.45 per cent, while that for women is a mere 29.69 per cent.

Women of this state say girls get access to higher education reluctantly, unlike their male siblings, and a man is able to acquire any number of wives

Over the years, the turbulent ground situation in the Northeast has taken the greatest toll on women

She has no right to property, and, in the event of being discarded, has to leave her husband's house empty-handed. Those divorced have to give up claims on the children, a dichotomy indeed, given that the same Mizos used to bury live infants with the body of their mother since she was considered indispensable to their nurture.

Since social ostracism is looked upon as the worst form of punishment in tribal societies, the women prefer to suffer in silence. And as the reality is so grim, the question of rights redressal is remote.

It is only when suffering stretches beyond endurance that a woman seeks a way out of this torturous labyrinth. While families of insurgents are expected to participate in their cause and self-styled "martyrdom," this is certainly not justified in the case of countless civilians whose kin fall prey to the ravages of militancy.

These are the victims the nation is quick to forget. Some, perhaps, die quite anonymously, as their families' protracted transition from domestic stability to rudderless waifs does not make headlines.

It is for them that the decision of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to take cognizance, for the first time, of terrorism perpetrated by militants as human rights abuses assumes significance.

The Amnesty report calls on armed groups "to abide by the principles of international humanitarian law." Whether they will heed this is another matter, but since the terrorists have always been quick to run to these bodies whenever they felt their "rights" had been encroached upon, they ought to lend them an ear on this matter. How these bodies will go

about ensuring the rights of those at the mercy of trigger-happy mercenaries will be interesting to watch.

On a superficial level, it would appear that terrorists have been benevolent towards women. They are usually the first to be released during a hijack, are seldom abducted and rarely killed.

Therefore, the focus of the watchdog organizations like Amnesty had hitherto been illegal detention, torture in police custody, excesses by security forces — incidents that can be investigated at length because the persons facing the accusations are not absconders. Which is the case with fighting militant depredations.

It is only now that the impact of extortions, hijackings, ambushes and killings by insurgents are being considered by the rights bodies as deterrents to peace. Given their impact on the social fabric, it is the long-suffering women, even more than security forces, who have cause for cheer.

Recent research indicates that the issue of women's empowerment is crucial to a state's economic profile. Literacy, too, is inseparable from an awareness of their rights and the ability to amend or seek to transform customary laws to suit their changing circumstances. Years of complacency, generated by the myth of an inverted gender status in some of these states have led to stagnation and minimal progress.

It is only after non-governmental organizations and rights activists launched awareness drives that the idea of redressal began to take root. It began as a sectoral movement, generated in urban areas and percolating downward.

Since it is the rural women who are more vulnerable to terrorism, the new tenets of rights bodies will hopefully safeguard their fragile interests. And enable the hen to join the rooster in heralding a new dawn.

Bihar takes centre stage

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 8. Though the two-week deadlock in the Lok Sabha over the RSS controversy ended today, normal business remained disrupted for much of the day because of a row over the Bihar Governor's conduct.

In both the Houses, a determined Opposition blocked proceedings protesting the installation of a "minority" Government in Bihar and alleging large-scale "horse-trading" by the National Democratic Alliance to help its Chief Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar, survive a vote of confidence on Friday. Noisy scenes forced an early adjournment of the two Houses with the Rajya Sabha rising shortly before lunch and the Lok Sabha later in the afternoon.

The truce in the Lok Sabha did

not last long. Barely had the House relaxed after the Prime Minister's statement when the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) members were on their feet demanding a discussion on Bihar.

Unhappy with the Speaker's decision to disallow their adjournment motions and angered by the statement of the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, that the Centre had nothing to do with the Governor's decision, they trooped into the "well" raising slogans against the "murder of democracy" in Bihar.

They also demanded the recall of the Governor, Mr. V.C. Pande. The Congress(I) and Left parties' members supported their protest, and as tempers rose, the Speaker adjourned the House until 2 p.m. Once again, question hour was a casualty.

When the House resumed with the Deputy Speaker, Mr. P.M. Sayeed, in the Chair, there was again a clamour for a debate on Bihar with the Opposition women MPs, speaking on the International Women's Day, pointing out that a woman — Ms. Rabri Devi — had been unfairly "denied" chief ministership. Ms. Phoolan Devi (Samajwadi Party) insisted that the "wrong" done to Ms. Rabri Devi be rectified.

The RJD members, led by Mr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, continued to demand a discussion on Bihar alleging that some Union Ministers were camping in Patna to help in "horse-trading." While the Deputy Speaker managed to get the official papers tabled, there were protests when a Bill was sought to be introduced and as noisy scenes continued he adjourned the House for the day.

THE HINDU
- 9 MAR 2000

Gujarat withdraws its circular on RSS

The Times of India News Service

GANDHINAGAR: The Gujarat government has withdrawn the controversial circular that allowed government officials to take part in RSS activities. The restriction that prevented government officials from participating in RSS activities was 're-imposed,' after two senior BJP leaders, Venkaiah Naidu and Govindacharya, airdashed to Ahmedabad on Wednesday afternoon. They held a three-hour meeting with chief minister Keshubhai Patel, industries minister Suresh Mehta, finance minister Vajubhai Vala, minister of state for home Haren Pandya and others. The meeting was held at the residence of state minister Bhupendra Lakhala.

The participants arrived at a decision to withdraw the circular "in the national interest", according to a well-placed source in the chief minister's office. "At a time when so much of hullabaloo was taking place in the country over the issue, this was the only decision to reach," the source added.

The meeting first took place in Ahmedabad and then at Gandhinagar. It was held at a time when BJP MLAs began mounting pressure for the withdrawal of the circular. "There is an increasing view among the MLAs that there was no need for the circular, that it was a political disaster, and that there was little reason for one to continue with it," a senior MLA told this newspaper.

However, hardliners in the BJP kept saying till the very end that the question of the withdrawing the circular did not arise. Even as the two emissaries of the party high command were in a discussion with the chief minister, the hardliners insisted that withdrawing the circular would prove to be a "disaster" for the state government.

One leader even said that the circular was

a "litmus test for the Central BJP leadership to see how the National Democratic Alliance partners behave on an RSS issue. Gujarat, being a model state, was made the test case".

Significantly, all the happenings in the RSS ban issue were kept a closely-guarded secret by the chief minister. Even cabinet colleagues were unaware. As late as Tuesday evening, 24-hours before the decision was taken to withdraw the circular, a senior minister in the state cabinet told this correspondent that the matter was not being discussed openly, and only Mr Patel and Mr Pandya were discussing it in direct consultation with the BJP's top leadership in Delhi and the RSS headquarters in Nagpur.

Meanwhile, the nine-day impasse in the Lok Sabha over the RSS issue ended on Wednesday with the government bowing to an opposition demand to discuss the matter under a motion which provides for a voting.

As the house assembled for the day and the agitated members were on their feet, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said that the government had no objection to a discussion under rule 184, which provides for a voting, and requested the chair to take necessary action.

Congress and other opposition parties had paralysed the proceedings in the house in the last eight days protesting the Gujarat government's order allowing its employees to join RSS.

After the chair had rejected notices of adjournment motion on the issue in the very beginning, they were adamant on the matter being debated under rule 184.

Soon after the PM's remarks, speaker G.M.C. Balayogi said that the business advisory committee would meet in the afternoon to decide about the time and duration of the discussion.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 9 MAR 2000

Nitish Kumar's efforts for consensus speaker fail

The Times of India News Service

PATNA: The countdown to decide the fate of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)-led government headed by Nitish Kumar began on Wednesday with senior Congress member Sadanand Singh filing his nomination papers for the post of speaker of the assembly despite Mr Kumar's attempts to effect an all-party consensus on the issue. Gajendra Prasad Himanshu of the JD-U is NDA's candidate.

"We tried for a consensus on the post of Speaker on Tuesday and also talked to AICC spokesman Ajit Jogi in the morning on Wednesday, but it did not work," Mr Nitish Kumar said. "Jogi said he would consult AICC general secretary Mohsina Kidwai but then we saw that Sadanand had filed his papers. The responsibility for breaking the convention (of consensus) should not rest with us but with the Congress and the other side," he added, saying he had also talked to CPI leaders.

However, RJD supremo Laloo Prasad Yadav was unapologetic about forcing a contest. "The convention is that the largest party or combine is invited by the governor to form the government, but this did not happen," Mr Yadav pointed out, adding, "Nitish did not talk to us. Besides, his gov-

ernment is illegal." Mr Yadav said he was in touch with the CPI, like-minded parties and independent members to muster support for Mr Singh.

This is the first time in Bihar since 1967 that there is a contest for the post of Speaker. Voting is scheduled to take place on Thursday, while the Nitish Kumar ministry is to seek a confidence vote in the House on Friday. Mr Singh is likely to have the backing of the RJD, CPM, Congress, CPI-ML and CPI-ML (TND), a total of 154 members. On the other hand, Mr Himanshu is being supported by the NDA constituents, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-Soren (JMM-S) and Independents whose tally is 150 members. In the present 322-member House, the winning candidate must poll 162 votes.

The NDA camp is banking on a split in the 23-member Congress legislature party and the five-member Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) group.

The CPI, with five MLAs, is yet to decide about its stand on the contest for the Speaker's post as well as the confidence vote to be sought by Mr Nitish Kumar. While the meeting of the CPI's state executive is in progress, Mr Yadav is reported to be in touch with its general secretary A.B. Bardhan.

THE TIMES OF INDIA
- 9 MAR 2000

RJD JUBILANT OVER VICTORY, NDA SHAKY

Cong. nominee unanimous choice for Bihar Speaker

By K. Balchand

PATNA, MARCH 9. The RJD-Congress (I)-CPI(M) combine in Bihar scored a major victory over the ruling NDA ahead of the vote of confidence the Chief Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar, is to seek tomorrow, with its candidate, Mr. Sadanand Singh, being elected the Assembly Speaker today.

Mr. Singh was elected unanimously by a voice vote without being opposed by the ruling combine which too extended its support, clearly because it failed to muster the necessary votes for its candidate, Mr. Gajendra Prasad Himanshu, whose nomination papers were not even taken up for consideration by the House.

Mr. Himanshu did not withdraw from the fray saying that there was no point in doing so when the NDA itself had given up the fight.

Nitish confident

Even after the Speaker's election, Mr. Kumar maintained that he would be able to prove his majority tomorrow, claiming that the NDA supported Mr. Singh with the objective of avoiding a division over the issue. He denied that he was buying time to once again try to split the Congress(I).

However, the distraught NDA leaders were still hoping to split the Congress(I) irrespective of their failure to do so over the past 10 days of the political drama triggered by the action of the Governor, Mr. V.C. Pande, hurriedly anointing Mr. Kumar as the Chief Minister.

Associates of Mr. Kumar now contend that the support they were expecting from a section of the Congress(I) had not come about because of their unwillingness to vote against their party nominee and added that they would cross the floor tomorrow when the trust motion would be put to vote.

To most observers this sounded specious, something to hang on



The Bihar Chief Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar, congratulating the BPCC president, Mr. Sadanand Singh, after his unanimous election as the Speaker of the 12th State Assembly in Patna on Thursday. (Right) The RJD chief, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, and Mr. Sadanand Singh, showing the victory sign. — Photos: Ranjeet Kumar

for another day for Mr. Kumar to appeal to the RJD allies to vote by their conscience.

Several Central Cabinet Ministers, including Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan and Mr. Sharad Yadav, are in the State capital for a final attempt to weaken the RJD-Congress(I)-CPI(M) combine.

At the same time, what is equally important is that the NDA might well be desperately trying to keep its own flock together as some of its MLAs have already started approaching the RJD.

The decision to support the RJD-sponsored nominee was formally taken at a meeting of the senior NDA leaders, including Mr. Kumar, early this morning. Their plan was not to force the issue today itself as losing would have left Mr. Kumar little option but to accept defeat tomorrow.

The equation in the House has not changed, but for Mr. Kumar's controversial nomination of a member of the Anglo-Indian community to give them representation in the Assembly. Though the pro-tem Speaker, Mr. Bisheshwar Khan, administered oath to Mr. J.P. Gaulstaun, he as-

sured the House, amid Opposition protests, that the Government had no right to make the nomination as it was yet to prove its majority and that he would take a final decision later.

In case the nominated member is allowed to vote tomorrow, the effective strength of the House will go up to 323. The RJD-led combine claims the support of 167 MLAs, including the six of the CPI(ML), all of whom were present in the House during the Speaker's election. The CPI, which has five MLAs, had abstained and is likely to take a decision later regarding the trust motion. In case the party decides to vote against the motion, the strength of those opposed to it would go up to 172.

On the other hand, the NDA's strength still continues to totter at 151 (including the nominated member). Its problem is compounded by the fact that the two "absconding" MLAs are yet to take oath. They did not turn up even today for the Speaker's election, though reports said they were present at the residence of a top JD(U) functionary. None of

the four MLAs against whom criminal cases are pending was present today.

If these six MLAs do not turn up tomorrow, it would make the NDA's task all the more difficult, as their strength would be only 145; in which case, only a split in the Congress(I) would help them.

Laloo wants Nitish to quit

The RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, related the NDA's decision to the "surrender by Gen. Niazi of Pakistan" and wondered why they had fielded a candidate if they were so keen on a consensus. He said Mr. Kumar had no right to be in office for even a moment after today's defeat and should immediately submit his resignation and the RJD's legislature party leader, Mrs. Rabri Devi, should be invited to form the Government.

On the CBI seeking sanction to prosecute him Mr. Laloo Yadav charged that it was "politically motivated" when the NDA's defeat had become clear. Mr. Kumar denied that neither the State Government or the Centre was behind the action.

The Bihar crisis

By Rajeev Dhavan

Mr. Nitish Kumar's 'swearing-in' is, itself, unconstitutional and implies that Mrs. Rabri Devi has been sacked even though she has not resigned.

THE EVENTS leading to the post-election Bihar crisis are as common place as they proved to be baffling. The election resulted in a hung Assembly. There was little in the final tallies except to give a 123:122 edge to Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav's (RJD) alliance over Mr. Nitish Kumar's NDA. If we lift the veil of the alliances, Mr. Yadav's RJD had 121 (excluding double victories by the same person in different constituencies) to the BJP's 67, the Samata's 34, the Congress's 23, the JD(U)'s 21, the JMM's 12, the CPI's 6, the CPI(ML)'s 6, the BSP's 5, the CPI(M)'s 2 and a massive 25 for independents and others. In India, pre-poll alliances are unreliable.

The anti-defection law does not apply until the Assembly meets and party affiliations are declared. Perhaps, this is a serious flaw which needs to be remedied to prevent candidates from defrauding both the people who elect them and the parties to which they belong.

All eyes were turned on the Governor, Mr. Vinod Pande. Both the timing and the substance of the Governor's meeting are crucial. If too much time elapses, a monkey-bag, suitcases-linked horse-trading starts. As soon as the Governor chooses a Chief Minister, 'suitcase' politics pursues his choice. On February 27, the RJD and NDA elected their leaders and prospective Chief Ministers. But, on February 28, Mr. Pande ducked the issues by postponing his choice until the Election Commission's (E.C.) formal notification was received constituting the House. There was no need for such postponement which was an invitation to bad politics. By February 29, analogies were drawn with Mr. Romesh Bhandari's mischievous solution in Uttar Pradesh in 1998 by suggesting that President's Rule may be imposed as a 'cooling off' device.

The devious hunt for support had begun. As if to underline the nature of Bihar politics, 11 under-trial Assembly winners opted for Mr. Nitish Kumar from jail. On March 1, Mr. Kumar presented the Governor with a list of 146 MLAs — 122 of the

NDA, 12 of the JMM and 12 Independents — a hotchpotch, if ever there was one, but still 16 short of the overall majority. Mrs. Rabri Devi claimed that the RJD was (a) the largest party, (b) with the largest alliance and (c) was confident of majority support. The Governor was reticent. Meanwhile, on March 1, the Congress(I) offered some kind of conditional support to the RJD. Unfortunately, on March 2, with an impeccable sense of bad timing, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, leader of the Congress (I), was seeing a cultural show in Khajuraho. Split in its ranks in Bihar, the Congress(I) dithered. By March 3, Mr. Pande decided to precipitate events by inviting Mr. Nitish Kumar to become Chief Minister of Bihar and prove his strength on the floor of the House.

Before we examine Mr. Pande's self-evidently premature and incorrect decision to call Mr. Nitish Kumar to become Chief Minister, attention needs to be drawn to the fact that the old Bihar Assembly has not been dissolved and is entitled to continue to April 14.

Can two Assemblies coexist? In 1957 and 1962, the old Lok Sabha was dissolved after the elections of the new. In 1967, there was a huge protest when the President wanted to summon the old House for a lame duck session even though the new Lok Sabha was ready for swearing in. Eventually, an ordinance was promulgated on February 28, 1967, to enable the dissolution of the old and constitution of the new Lok Sabha on March 4, 1967. When Rajiv Gandhi refused to dissolve the old Lok Sabha in 1989, he was compelled to do so by public opinion to avoid a constitutional imbroglio.

Mr. Pande must be aware of all this. He cannot dissolve the old Bihar Assembly without Mrs. Rabri Devi's advice. He cannot summon the new Assembly until the

old Assembly is dissolved. Until the old Assembly is dissolved, Mrs. Rabri Devi remains Chief Minister. While she does so, any actions of the new Assembly — including its constitution, election of the Speaker and confidence vote — are unconstitutional and illegal. Indeed, Mr. Nitish Kumar's 'swearing-in' is, itself, unconstitutional and implies that Mrs. Rabri Devi has been sacked even though she has not resigned. All this defies constitutionality.

Mr. Pande's decisions in the Bihar crisis cannot inspire confidence. His waiting till the E.C. constituted the House

mischievously created a political limbo and opened up horse-trading. But Mr. Pande's "un-masterly inactivity" between February 28 and March 1 was short-lived. On March 3, he hurriedly chose Mr. Kumar as Chief Minister even whilst negotiations were going on, and Mr. Kumar was admittedly 16 members short of a majority. That Ms. Sonia Gandhi had no business to be in Khajuraho while the Congress(I) remained equivocal is besides the point. The first choice before Mr. Pande was to either opt for a 'Raj Bhavan' preview or leave it to the 'floor of the House'. He did a mixture of neither.

If the issue was to be left to the 'floor of the House', Mrs. Rabri Devi was doubly qualified to meet the House as Chief Minister. She was the incumbent Chief Minister, the leader of the largest alliance (albeit by a whisker) and undoubtedly the leader of the largest party (if the alliances were treated as inherently fragile). If there was to be a Raj Bhavan preview, what Mr. Pande did was disconcertingly casual.

The only justification for his gubernatorially created two-day limbo was that a firm majority may emerge. In fact, no majority had emerged. Mr. Nitish Kumar has claimed support of 146. If Mrs. Rabri Devi

had Congress(I) support, she would also claim 146. But, before the Congress(I) could formalise or refuse support, Mr. Pande pulled the rug from under the RJD and Mrs. Rabri Devi's claims. He had no justification for doing so.

Even after 50 turbulent years, it seems odd that we are unable to formalise even the principles of a code of practice for selecting Chief Ministers and Prime Ministers despite the deliberations of the Bhagwan Sahay Committee (1971), the Sarkaria Commission (1988) and a richness of experience and guile in these matters which outmatches any other country.

The principles should be clear by now. Principle I: If the election yields a clear majority leader with support from a single political party or alliance, such a majority leader should be sworn in. Principle II: Where no such clear majority leader emerges, then after a reasonable time has been given to all concerned, the Governor should consider if the incumbent Chief Minister, who is also the leader of the largest party or combination, wishes to test his or her majority on the floor of the House. Such a Chief Minister must decline office if assured support for the future is hopeless (This is what Rajiv Gandhi did in 1989, and Mr. Vajpayee failed to do in 1996). Principle III: Where the incumbent Chief Minister is not head of the largest party or combination, the privilege of meeting the new House as Chief Minister belongs to the leader who heads the largest party or combination. The rest is to be left to the House.

The Government of India Act 1935 and Draft Constitution of 1947 had an "Instrument of Instructions" for the Governors. This was deleted by our Constituent Assembly. But, Article 160 of the Constitution leaves open the possibility of such instructions being evolved.

Otherwise, Indian democracy will be in the hands of Governors such as Mr. Romesh Bhandari and Mr. Vinod Pande. But, there is also a lesson in this for the Congress(I). It should stop dithering. Ms. Sonia Gandhi had no business to be watching a show in Khajuraho when she was needed in Delhi.

Strategic retreat on RSS bar: Gujarat minister

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GANDHINAGAR, March 9. — In the face of a jubilant Congress Opposition demanding the resignations of the Gujarat Chief Minister, Mr Keshubhai Patel, and the Finance Minister, Mr Vajubhai Vala, the Minister of State for Home, Mr Haren Pandya, today admitted that the controversial circular regarding the RSS had been withdrawn "for strategic reasons".

The day in the Assembly saw Congressmen celebrating their "victory". They marched to the grounds of the Assembly secretariat and garlanded a statue of Mahatma Gandhi and then burst crackers and distributed sweets. One legislator, who carried the sweets inside the House and offered them to the Speaker, was suspended for the day. The Congressmen sought the resignations of the Chief Minister and the Finance Minister on the grounds of their previous statements in the Assembly where they had announced that the RSS circular will not be withdrawn, even if the government has to go.

Mr Haren Pandya said the RSS is a cultural organisation and not a political one. He wanted to know why the Congress started the agitation 15 days after the circular withdrawing the ban on government servants joining the RSS was released. Mr Amarsinh Chaudhary objected to this and said the party had protested on the very next day.

Mr Pandya, in a spirited defence, said the circular had been withdrawn "for strategic reasons" and went on to say that to take a big leap sometime one has to retreat a few steps.

The minister wanted to know why the Congress protested only against the RSS and not against the groups which are allied with the ISI.

He also wanted to know why organisations like the Seva Dal, which are aligned with the Congress, are not under the banned list.

Mr Pandya taunted the Congress on the presence of Mr Shankersinh Vaghela, an RSS man for years, in their party. "Will you disown him now?" he asked. He pointed out that a number of Congressmen had also attended the RSS "shिवir" in Ahmedabad. "Will they be thrown out of the party?" he asked.

The minister wanted to know whether the Congress wanted states to function in an autonomous fashion or be subservient to the Centre. He questioned the Congress members for keeping quiet on incidents of violence against Christians in Orissa. "It is because there was no BJP government there," he said.

Mr Haren Pandya emphasised that "we believe in our philosophy and will continue to do so", and told the Congress that their party had been consistently losing elections because they turned their back on the Hindus. "This is mentioned in your Gadgil Commission report", he said.

Mr Pandya said the Prime Minister had in Parliament agreed to a debate and voting on the issue. After this the state government agreed to withdraw the order.

Outside the Assembly, Mr Pandya told journalists that the "turning point" in rescinding the RSS circular came after two senior BJP functionaries came to Gandhinagar on Wednesday. "They told the senior leaders the entire situation which included the developments in Parliament, the opinion of the allies in the NDA, the coming elections in Andhra Pradesh and the rest".

Mr Pandya said the situation was explained "without any transmission loss" and the state leaders agreed to reverse the earlier decision.

THE STATESMAN
10 MAR 2000

BIHAR:

(Continued from page 1)

Laloo smells victory in Nitish backout

RJD wins battle for Speaker

9.9. Bihar
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA, March 9. — The NDA gave up without a fight the post of Bihar Speaker today, withdrawing its nominee before the vote in the House, and sending out the message that Mr Nitish Kumar may not be able to survive the motion of confidence tomorrow.

Another blow came from the CPI, which announced late this evening that it would oppose Mr Kumar's trust motion. The NDA was a "communal formation", the CPI said.

The CPI has 5 MLAs. Its alliance partner, the 6-member CPI-ML (Liberation), has already announced it would vote against the government. With 11 MLAs added to the 160 (minus the Speaker) with Mrs Rabri Devi, the government now faces the prospect of 171 votes against — 9 more than the majority mark.

10/3
The House today unanimously elected Mr Sadanand Singh, Bihar Congress chief and the RJD's nominee, to the post of Speaker.

Said the chief minister: "We abided by the House's tradition to have an unanimous election of the Speaker. We withdrew our candidate to ensure the Speaker is elected unanimously."

'GREAT REFUSAL'

PATNA, March 9 — An NDA leader today called on Mr Umadhar Singh, CPI-ML (TND) MLA, with an offer of Rs 50 lakh and a ministry if he voted for Mr Nitish Kumar tomorrow. The Naxalite leader told **The Statesman** he had spurned the offer and told the leader he was not for sale.

Mr Singh is one of the founders of the Naxalite movement in Bihar. He formed the CPI-ML (TND) after the CPI-ML split in the early 1970s. The CPI-ML (TND) is active in a small pocket spread over East and West Champaran districts. — SNS

The day's developments shot currents of jubilation through the anti-NDA camp, even as it dealt a benumbing blow to Mr Nitish Kumar: The NDA's

■ See BIHAR: page 8

back-off was clearly forced by its failure to rally a majority behind Mr Himanshu.

The RJD spokesman, Mr Shivanand Tiwary, described the election of Mr Singh as a "prelude" to the fall of Mr Nitish Kumar.

"Yes, it is a prelude to the defeat of the minority NDA government," Mr Tiwary said. "Mr Nitish Kumar should resign as chief minister following his failure to get the NDA nominee elected as the Speaker."

Speaking on TV, Mr Laloo Yadav had the same advice for the former Union agriculture minister. Mr Kumar is scheduled to table a motion of confidence in the Assembly tomorrow. But the chief minister continued to insist he was likely to pull it off.

"I am hopeful of proving my majority in the House," Mr Kumar said. And his parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Sushil Kumar Modi, announced a "good number of MLAs" in the Congress were still not in a mood to oppose the government. "We still hope that the Congress MLAs opposed to the Laloo-Rabri regime will vote in favour of the NDA."

The Congress, however, ruled out chances of a split in the CLP. "Election of Mr Sadanand Singh as Speaker has proved beyond all doubt that the Congress is united and one," party general secretary, Mr Shakil-uz-Zaman, said. "The party is committed to block the installation of the communal government."

From the beginning in fact, the fate of Mr Nitish Kumar has appeared to hinge on a split in the Congress, and the NDA's thinktank has been working overtime to achieve that objective.

Mr Laloo Yadav's master stroke yesterday — throwing his weight behind Mr Singh — dealt a body blow to the NDA's hopes. And the CPI's description today of the RJD as a "casteist and corrupt outfit", and the communists' state executive's decision to vote against the RJD as well, would have given Mr Kumar little pleasure.

Mr Kumar has the backing of only 151 MLAs in the House of 323. The strength of the Assembly went up by one when the government nominated Mr Rozario as a representative of the Anglo-Indian community. The RJD has said the nomination ought not to have been made without Mr Kumar first proving his majority.

Earlier, thanking the new Speaker, Mr Laloo Yadav described Mr Kumar as his "chhota bhai (younger brother)". "My younger brother Nitish Kumar should feel happy and safe, for he has got a strong elder brother like me ... The younger brother should not be worried at all when he has a powerful elder brother."

THE STATESMAN
10 MAR 2000

Nitish throws in the towel

Eight-day-old NDA Govt in Bihar falls without seeking confidence vote

HT Correspondent
Patna, March 10

THE EIGHT-day-old NDA Government in Bihar fell today. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar resigned without seeking a vote of confidence that was scheduled for today.

Replying to the debate on the motion, Mr Kumar conceded that he did not enjoy the support of the majority in the House and was therefore proceeding to Raj Bhavan from the state Assembly to tender his resignation. He said it would be a futile exercise to press for a division.

Mr Kumar lashed out at the Congress for "indulging in worst kind of political opportunism" by realigning itself with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), which was its main target during the election campaign. He quoted newspapers reports extensively on election speeches by Congress leaders in which they had severely criticised the RJD for its "poor governance and complete breakdown of law and order".

The Congress would have to explain its sudden change of stance over extending support to a regime which it had vowed to finish, the outgoing Chief Minister said.

He observed that the Congress was an ally of the RJD during the

Samata Party on Bihar's financial situation.

Mr Kumar said the NDA's share of vote percentage was much higher than that of the RJD and its allies, but the number of seats it won was fewer than what it had expected because of the peculiar arithmetic of parliamentary democracy. The NDA lost at least 26 seats by a margin of less than 1000 votes and another 20 seats by a margin of 1000-2000 votes, Mr Kumar said.

Opposing the confidence motion, Mr Laloo Yadav said the Nitish Kumar Government was unconstitutional and undemocratic and it therefore had no moral right to remain in power. He also attacked the Governor for having invited a political combination that lacked the support of the majority in the House. The Governor, he said, encouraged horse-trading by allowing a government that did not have the requisite numbers.

Mr Yadav contended that the RJD and its allies, along with the votes of the rebel candidates, polled 35 per cent vote. If the votes of the Congress were to be added the total percentage of votes against the NDA would stand at 55 per cent. The NDA along with the votes of its rebel candidates polled only 35 per cent votes, he added.

RJD, allies boycott Governor: Pg 11



DIN IN THE HOUSE: A section of Bihar legislators raising slogans against Governor Vinod Pande during his speech in the Assembly in Patna on Friday. Photo: PTI

Lok Sabha elections but it severed its ties with that party before the Assembly elections, blaming it for all the ills plaguing the state. He pointed out that Ms Sonia Gandhi had publicly stated that RJD rule

was synonymous with "terror and anarchy" and observed that it had no right to stay in power.

Mr Kumar said the CPI and the CPI-ML had publicly maintained they would remain equidistant

from both the NDA and the RJD. He singled out his former party colleagues, Shivanand Tiwari and Shakumi Choudhary for individual criticism. Mr Tiwari, he said, had prepared a white paper for the

Governor must quit: Opposition

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 10

A TRIUMPHANT Opposition has begun to raise a clamour for Governor V C Pande's ouster following Mr Nitish Kumar's resignation as Chief Minister without facing the confidence vote and "the defeat of the communal forces in the states".

Asserting that they were vindicated in their stand that the Governor had foisted a minority government on the State, the general refrain in the Opposition camp is that Mr Pande "has no right to continue in office and should quit forthwith, failing which he should immediately be recalled."

If the demand for Mr Pande's scalp figured prominently and uniformly across the opposition spectrum, specific demands were also made for the resignations of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Home Minister L K Advani. Predictions were also made that the collapse of the Central Government was now imminent.

The Congress noted that the defeat of the "illegitimate NDA Government" represented a victory for the democratic and secular forces in Bihar that "steadfastly remained united and defeated the machinations of the BJP".

The party, in a statement, said the "retrograde political forces had connived with the Bihar Governor" to install themselves in power in vio-

lation of all constitutional and democratic norms. In the end, the designs of the "communal and fascist forces" had been thwarted, the Congress said, adding that this denouement represented a resounding victory for the democratic and secular forces.

Reiterating the demand that the Governor should either quit or be recalled, the CPI-M charged Mr Pande of being part of the "conspiracy" to foist the NDA Government when it was "crystal clear" that it could not muster majority. The Governor had by his action permitted both time and scope for naked horse-trading, it charged, adding that despite all these efforts the conspiracy did not succeed. The "sordid chapter" of trying to "subvert democracy" in Bihar ended with Mr Kumar's resignation, it said.

The party, which had fought the Assembly elections with the RJD, renewed its call that the mandate of the people be respected and Smt Rabri Devi be asked to form the government.

Coming close on the heels of the withdrawal of the controversial order of the Gujarat Government, Samajwadi Party general secretary Amar Singh saw Nitish Kumar's resignation as another incident of the BJP-led NDA "succumbing" to the strength and "rock-like unity" of the secular forces and demanded that Mr Vajpayee resign on moral grounds and Mr Advani for his role in the whole affair. He even maintained that the fall of the NDA Government now appeared imminent.

The CPI accused the Governor of acting in a "hasty, biased and most undemocratic manner." "If he has any sense of morality, he should go," national secretary D. Raja said. The Bihar developments, he said, exposed the NDA's "lust for power" by using the Governor's office, indulging in horse-trading and splitting other parties.

In the coming days, all eyes are likely to rivet to the stand that the 11-legislator strong CPI-CPI (ML) takes if the RJD is invited to form the government. The combine had fought both the NDA and the RJD-Congress in the elections. Keeping the emerging scenario in mind, the CPI has called a meeting of its National Executive on Monday to discuss the issue.

Meanwhile, the RSP and the Forward Block too joined the chorus for the Governor's recall. The Governor, RSP leader Abani Roy said, should be recalled for installing a government without ascertaining the number. "Such a Governor should not be sent to any state," he said. In a statement, Janata Party President Subramaniam Swamy demanded that the Prime Minister "atone" for the "ignoble and disgraceful" collapse of the Nitish Kumar Government. He should ask the President to remove the Governor and drop Mr Advani from the Cabinet, Mr Swamy said. If Mr Vajpayee was not able to do that he should resign to protect the dignity and honour of the Prime Minister's office, he said.

NDA BLAMES CONGRESS, BSP; RABRI STAKES CLAIM

Nitish develops cold feet, quits

By K. Balchand

PATNA, MARCH 10. The Bihar Chief Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar, today submitted his resignation to the Governor, Mr. V. C. Pande, within seven days of assuming office in rather controversial circumstances that had brought the role of the latter under a question mark.

Soon afterwards, Mrs. Rabri Devi of the Rashtriya Janata Dal met Mr. Pande and staked claim to form the Government. According to RJD leaders, the Governor is likely to consult legal experts before taking a decision.

The Chief Minister, who has been asked to continue in the post till alternate arrangements were made, announced his resignation on the floor of the House without putting his motion seeking a trust vote to test. In contrast to his earlier assertions, Mr. Kumar conceded that he lacked majority, something which he had asserted while staking claim to form the Government and while justifying the Governor's action in giving him preference over the former Chief Minister, Mrs. Rabri Devi.

The Chief Minister's decision came at the end of a two and half hour debate on his motion. Mr. Kumar blamed the Congress(I) and the BSP for not supporting his Government and said their stand had put him at a disadvantage leaving him with no option but to resign.

The NDA leader justified the Governor's decision to invite him to form the Government but had little to say on his confidence to prove the majority on the floor of the House and the causes for his failure to do so.

Later talking to reporters, he said he would continue his struggle in the State as a member of the Lok Sabha. Mr. Kumar said that it was up to the Governor to take a decision on the new Government. Despite being well aware that he lacked the confidence of the Assembly, Mr. Kumar took everyone by surprise by presenting the Budget for the 2000-2001 financial year, despite protests from the Opposition members who claimed that he was once again violating rules and traditions.

The Opposition, however, did not the press the issue for fear of being distracted from the busyness of bringing down the Government. Mr. Kumar has earned the dubious distinction of being in office for the shortest period — seven days, with the exception of Mr. Satish Prasad, a stop-gap Chief Minister in 1968 for four days.

The outcome was never in doubt following the manner in which the NDA backed out of the election for the Speaker's post on Thursday. But Mr. Kumar's insistence on tabling his trust motion raised some speculation.

If there were any doubts, the

ders for power. The Governor had neither elicited the opinion of the various political parties nor had he set a deadline to the two contenders to establish their claims.

The Governor had acted in haste when it became clear that both the BSP and the Congress(I) had come out in the RJD's favour and worse, he ignored Mrs. Rabri Devi's claim of enjoying the support of 161 MLAs.

The Governor and Mr. Kumar were also targeted by the Congress(I), BSP, and Left parties for their combined role in denying the RJD a chance to form the Government. The entire Opposition demanded that the Centre recall Mr. Pande immediately as its stand had been vindicated by Mr. Kumar's resignation.

RJD submits letter

Late in the evening, the former Chief Minister, Mrs. Rabri Devi, accompanied among others by her husband, Mr. Laloo Yadav, called on the Governor and submitted a list of 162 MLAs, including members of the Congress(I) and the BSP. She said she enjoyed majority support in the 322-member House.

At the same time, the RJD-Congress(I)-CPI(M) combine also stepped up its demand for the immediate recall of Mr. Pande.

Governor's should go: Page 13
Editorial on Page 12



FRIENDLY FOES: The RJD chief, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, consoles Mr. Nitish Kumar, just before his resignation as Chief Minister of Bihar in Patna on Friday. — Photo: Ranjeet Kumar

ity Government through unconstitutional methods. The Governor had opened the doors for horse-trading, he charged and pointed out that it was borne out by the statements of the NDA leaders that the Congress(I), BSP and the RJD were likely to split.

Even as other party leaders sought the immediate recall of Mr. Pande, the RJD chief attacked him for not ascertaining the strength of the two rival conten-

USA sees Pak hand in N-E violence

DESIKAN THIRUNARAYANAPURAM
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON, March 10. — The US administration believes Pakistan's ISI is fomenting extremist violence in the North-east, possibly working through dissident groups with bases in Bangladesh, a senior official has said.

"We believe the ISI is helping militants in Assam," the Washington Times quoted the unidentified state department official as saying. "Since they attack unarmed civilians for political purposes, the militants meet the classical definition of terrorists," the official said.

Indian and Bangladeshi governments have stated that ISI agents in Bangladesh are training and arming ultras of ULFA and other groups.

To this charge, Mr Zamir Akram, deputy chief of Missions of Pakistan Embassy here, said: "It is not unusual for India to blame the ISI for everything. It's impossible. What kind of a reach

can ISI have in Assam?"

He, in turn, accused RAW of sponsoring terrorist attacks in Pakistan. "We have arrested people who, on interrogation, said they were paid by RAW to plant bombs in railway stations and markets."

The Times also quoted a senior South Asian diplomat, not from India, saying that ISI has been infiltrated by Islamic militants working with fundamentalists in Bangladesh to launch attacks on India.

Bangladesh Ambassador in Washington, Mr KM Shahabuddin, was quoted by the newspaper as saying that Pakistani Intelligence has been operating terrorist cells in his country. But he also said these groups had been stymied by the Awami League government of Mrs Hasina Wazed, who is grateful

for India's help to her father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in the liberation struggle.

"The present government makes it impossible for ISI to operate against India from Bangladesh — the President won't allow it," he said.

LAHORE BUS MISHAP

AMBALA, March 10. — A Delhi-bound Pakistan government bus from Lahore collided with a sugarcane-laden tractor trolley on GT Road here this afternoon. All 37 passengers, including 16 Indians and 18 Pakistanis, escaped unhurt. The bus was carrying 16 Indians, 18 Pakistanis, one Britisher and two Sri Lankans. One side of the bus was slightly damaged in the accident. — UNI

THE STATESMAN
11 MAR 2000

Rabri sworn in CM, given 10 days to prove majority

By K. Balchand

PATNA, MARCH 11. The Rashtriya Janata Dal's Mrs. Rabri Devi was today sworn in Chief Minister of Bihar and administered the oath of office by the Governor, Mr. V. C. Pande, ending the spell of uncertainty in the State.

The Governor, who extended the invitation letter earlier in the day, directed Mrs. Rabri Devi to prove her majority in the Assembly within 10 days. She succeeds Mr. Nitish Kumar of the National Democratic Alliance, who resigned on Friday.

Interestingly, Mr. Pande in his letter inviting Mrs. Rabri Devi to form the Government clarified that he had invited Mr. Kumar first on the ground that Mr. Kumar had backed his claim to form the Government with a greater number of supporters. Mr. Pande also pointed out after the NDA leader tendered his resignation having failed to secure the confidence of the House, he invited Mrs. Rabri Devi to form the Government.

Mrs. Rabri Devi, the 30th Chief Minister of the State, assumed office for the third time in less than three years. She was sworn in for the first time on July 25, 1997 in the wake of her husband, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav's implication in the fodder scam case. That reign ended on February 12, 1999 when the BJP-led Central Government dismissed her Government and imposed President's rule. The Vajpayee Government reinstated her on March 8, 1999 when it became clear that it would suffer a defeat in the Rajya Sabha over the issue.

On March 8 this year, the Governor ignored her claim and invited Mr. Nitish Kumar. He, however, lasted only seven days.

Mrs. Rabri Devi's new dispensation would be in line with the era of coalitions the NDA ushered in last week after almost three decades. It would also mean the return of the Congress(I) to power in the State after a gap of 10 years, even if it were to be as a junior partner.

Mrs. Rabri Devi alone took oath today. The RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, said the Cabinet would be formed after consultations with all coalition partners.

While the CPI(M) has made it clear that it would extent support from the outside, sources in the Bahujan Samaj Party here said their party was unlikely to join the government. In such a case, it would be a two-party coalition.

Claiming that the RJD-led coalition enjoyed the support of over 200 MLAs, the party chief



BACK IN THE SADDLE: The Rashtriya Janata Dal leader, Mrs. Rabri Devi, being administered oath of office as Chief Minister of Bihar by the Governor, Mr. Vinod Pande, at the Raj Bhavan in Patna on Saturday. — Photo: Ranjeet Kumar.

said Mrs. Rabri Devi had submitted a list of 162 MLAs while staking claim. He charged that there had been a conspiracy to impose President's rule in the State.

Apparently not sure of Raj Bhavan inviting the RJD to form the government, Mr. Yadav summoned a press conference but minutes before that came the invitation.

The NDA leaders, on the other hand, said the Governor should not have administered oath of office to Mrs. Rabri Devi in the light of the sanction the CBI had sought from him to prosecute her and Mr. Yadav in the disproportionate assets case. Mr. Nitish Kumar said the new administration would be far from stable and that the case would take its toll.

The NDA formed a steering committee at the State-level with Mr. Kumar as chairman to launch a campaign against the Congress(I), in particular for not allowing the alliance to remain in power. The NDA also decided to observe a "betrayal day" on March 13 and announced a series of programmes to expose the alleged conspiracy.

In another development, the Bihar People's Party led by Mr. Anand Mohan walked out of the alliance and supported the RJD-led gov-

ernment. None of the NDA leaders, including Mr. Kumar, were present at the swearing-in ceremony.

PM refuses comment

Alok Mukherjee writes from Mauritius:

The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, has declined to comment on the developments in Bihar and dismissed queries from reporters by making light of the situation.

Asked for comments during his visit to Apravasi Ghat — where migrants from Bihar first landed in Mauritius in the last century — he said "you are asking this question because we are at this Ghat. Biharis may have landed here, but I am not going to talk about Bihar here."

PTI, UNI report from New Delhi:

The Janata Dal (United) has categorically said there was no question of supporting an RJD Government in Bihar even minus Mrs. Rabri Devi.

The Union Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, demanded fresh Assembly elections after imposing President's rule in the State.

Another photo on Page 11

Rabri sworn in as CM under CBI cloud

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA, March 11. — The threat of prosecution by CBI hung dark over Mrs Rabri Devi as she returned to power today ten days after resigning as Bihar chief minister.

The Governor, Mr VC Pande, administered the oath of office and secrecy and gave her 10 days to prove she has a majority in the House with an effective strength of 322. Mrs Rabri Devi had submitted a list of 162 MLAs to Mr Pande after Mr Nitish Kumar resigned yesterday.

"We are in a majority and we will prove it in the House," said Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav. "The ministry will be expanded on Monday after talking to our allies."

Mr SR Bommai of the JD-Secular, and RJD, CPI-M and Congress leaders attended the swearing-in. The NDA stayed away.

From Patna and New Delhi, emanated signals today that Mr Laloo Yadav's triumph notwithstanding, the BJP and allies were yet unwilling to give up on Bihar. Mr Nitish Kumar and Mr JP Mathur, BJP, indicated the CBI may soon chargesheet the Yadavs in the disproportionate assets case.

A belligerent RJD supremo, on his part, promised the agency would be kept out of the borders of Bihar.

"The days of the Rabri Devi dispensation are numbered," declared the outgoing chief minister. "The NDA will stage a comeback to power sooner than expected ... the chief minister will be chargesheeted soon after the Governor sanctions the CBI to prosecute her and Mr Laloo Yadav in the dis-

proportionate assets case. She or anyone else chargesheeted in a corruption case cannot hold a Constitutional post."

In Delhi, Mr Mathur said the Governor could give CBI the nod to go ahead. "In that case it would not be possible for either Mrs Rabri Devi or Mr Laloo Yadav to remain in power."

The mood in party circles appeared to be quietly optimistic. "In the 10 days that the Governor has given Mrs Rabri Devi, he may allow the CBI to move in. In that case the entire political scenario could change," said a BJP leader.



Mrs Rabri Devi

■ Editorial: Dark tunnel, page 8
■ Another report, photograph on page 7

Mr Laloo Yadav, however, announced he had other plans.

CBI would be allowed to investigate only those cases "which the court has allowed it to investigate," he declared. "The investigating agency will not be permitted to interfere with cases which the court has not referred to it."

On CBI's request to the Governor seeking a go-ahead

for prosecution, Mr Yadav said: "It has become absolutely clear that the CBI is working against me and Mrs Rabri Devi at the behest of the communal BJP government at the Centre. The timing of dragging Mrs Rabri Devi into the case and seeking prosecution orders against her suggests that the BJP is using the investigating agency to meet its political objectives."

He announced the state government would not hand over any case to the CBI, for the "CBI's credibility is in doubt." Instead, "the state vigilance bureau will be toned up to carry out a proper probe into corruption cases against public servants."

That a bitter battle was on the cards in Bihar became apparent today when Mr Sushil Kumar Modi faxed a memorandum to Mr Pande urging him not to administer oath to a person against whom he was due to issue a prosecution order, and Mr Nitish Kumar announced he would stay back in the state to mobilise the people against "jungle raj" and the "parties which helped Mrs Rabri Devi to return".

The NDA formed a steering committee under Mr Kumar, and a coordination committee under Mr Modi to launch a "mass campaign" to expose the Congress for "betraying the people's mandate".

Mr Kumar told reporters that the Congress had cheated the electorate it had approached "entirely on the plank of the Laloo-Rabri jungle raj in Bihar". The NDA, he announced, would observe 13 March as Vishwasghaat Diwas (Breach of Faith Day) against the Congress.

THE STATESMAN
12 MAR 2000

Cong may join Bihar govt, BSP offers support

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 11. — With most of its MLAs rooting for the move, the Congress is likely to join the Rabri Devi government on the basis of the common minimum programme it worked out with the RJD. The BSP will only offer conditional support, while the CPI is yet to decide its course of action.

The CWC will take a final decision within a couple of days. The CWC met today, but deferred the decision as five senior members — Mr Pranab Mukherjee, Mr Rajesh Pilot, Mr K Karunakaran, Mr AK Antony and Mrs Ambika Soni — could not be present at the meeting called at short notice.

The AICC general secretary in charge of Bihar, Mrs Mohsina Kidwai, and the party's central observer, Mr Ajit

Jogi, who have been camping in Patna for the past week, briefed the CWC about the developments in the state.

Mr Jogi reportedly told the CWC that it would be difficult to keep the Congress flock together in the critically hung Bihar Assembly if there is no commitment from the central leadership on joining the government.

"There should not be any further delay in the announcement. The decision better be announced by the central leadership, otherwise many of the MLAs may not support the RJD," a senior party functionary said.

According to senior leaders, the Congress had no objection "in principle" to joining the government, after the common minimum programme addressed initial hiccups. The par-

ty's Panchmarhi session had expressed reservations against coalition governments, but kept the door open for joining the government through common minimum programmes.

The CPI will hold its national executive meeting on Monday to finalise its stand on the Bihar issue, adds SNS from Delhi. Even though the central leadership is in favour of supporting the Rabri Devi government, the state unit is against it. The CPI could opt to abstain during voting.

The BSP vice-president, Ms Mayawati, today said the party's five MLAs would offer the RJD government conditional support, but wouldn't join the ministry.

In exchange of BSP support, she demanded that the ban against the Ranveer Sena be effectively implemented.

THE STATESMAN

12 MAR 2000

TRIPURA TROUBLE

Tribal militancy and Bengali chauvinism

THE Bangla Mukti Sena, a newly floated ultra Bengali outfit has recently surfaced, claiming responsibility for a bomb attack in west Tripura in which two tribals were killed. This is a disturbing development. The ethnic and linguistic implications are that it is bound to further widen the divide between the state's Bengalis and tribals and deepen mistrust between them. There is no doubt that the formation of BMS is a chauvinistic reaction to the wanton abduction and killing of Bengalis by tribal militant outfits. It is also a loud expression of no confidence in the Marxist government's pathetic law and order machinery and its inability to deal with tribal militants adequately. It also portrays the helplessness of the government which is increasingly abdicating its authority and surrendering its writ to militants. Abduction and killing of Bengalis by tribal outfits have become so frequent that even the state's Marxist government has ceased to maintain statistical records. In fact people's faith in the local police has been so badly shaken that in many cases they are not informed.

Abduction is an easy way to make money; the ransom, usually in lakhs, keeps the militants going. The writ of the government does not run beyond Agartala and a few district and sub-divisional towns although paradoxically it has won almost all elections — to Parliament, assembly and village councils. But administratively it has been ineffective on account of lack of accountability, professional competence and discipline. This has had a telling effect on the quality of governance. The curse of union raj in police establishments has demoralised the entire law enforcement machinery. The Marxists have also failed to devise a result-oriented strategy, which has provoked the backlash from the Bengalis. While it is true that the Centre has been less than forthcoming in providing help to combat militancy, the Marxists must realise that the ultimate responsibility in dealing with the menace rests with them. They seem to lack the political will to act.

THE STATESMAN
13 MAR 2000

NCP support for Mawlong govt

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

SHILLONG, March 12. — The E K Mawlong government received a shot in the arm when the Nationalist Congress Party general secretary, Mr Purno A Sangma, extended his party's co-operation for ensuring better governance in Meghalaya.

Mr Sangma said he was confident that the new chief minister, also his old friend, would be able to provide good governance with new direction and initiative.

Mr Sangma said he had come to Shillong to congratulate Mr Mawlong on his becoming chief minister. He said he would visit the state again in a week to have a detailed discussion with the chief minister on issues pertaining to development and the common minimum programme.

To maintain better co-ordination between the UDP and his party, Mr Sangma said a Political Affairs Committee of NCP was constituted with Mr Sangma as chairman and Mr Lotsing A Sharma as convener.

Other PAC members are Mr Robert Kharsing, Mr E D Marak, Prof W Kharli, Mr M Rava and Mrs M War.

Instability has plagued Meghalaya; there has been five major changes in the government and the state got three chief minister in two years since the last Assembly elections (held in February 1998).

Mr Sangma made it clear that though the ruling United Democratic Party has 20 MLAs and NCP 15, including six associated members, it was in a position to form the government in the 60-member Meghalaya Assembly. The other ally, the BJP, would not be disturbed at all, he said.

Mr Sangma stressed the need for development through good governance, adding his party

would never concentrate on politics only. Talking about priorities, the NCP leader — who also became an MP seven times in a row from Tura — said special attention would be given to the information technology sector in Meghalaya.

He said after the Meghalaya budget session was over, a team of ministers would go to Hyderabad and Bangalore to

Experience got me on review panel: Sangma

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

SHILLONG, March 12. — Mr Purno A Sangma today said he



Sangma

was included in the Constitution Review Committee due to his 20-year-long experience in Parliament. He denied there was any controversy regarding his inclusion in the panel. The former Lok Sabha Speaker said: "I have attended several seminars and workshops and advocated changes in the working of the Constitution. I was included in the panel not as a member of the NCP party as no party is represented in the body."

Mr Sangma said he had decided to participate in the panel after the Union government made it clear that the body would examine the working of the Constitution and not the Constitution itself. While saying the basic principles of the Constitution should not be changed, he added that "several Schedules and Articles of the Constitution had to be examined."

make an on-the-spot survey.

He said since Meghalaya had been identified by the Centre as a state with most potential for technological development, the government would take all possible measures to build up infrastructure.

He also said all North-east MPs urged the Centre to establish the fourth Indian Institute of Information Technology in the region.

The other three, he said, would be set up in Allahabad, Hyderabad and Guwalior.

Mr Sangma, expressing concern over the deterioration of law and order situation in Meghalaya, said strengthening the forces would not solve the problem.

The NCP leader spoke of the problems of having a dialogue with insurgent groups; more and more groups were emerging.

The multiplicity of groups comes in the way of having a fruitful dialogue; if you negotiate with one group, another group triggers violence to catch your attention, he said.

He said a dialogue should not be stopped at any level. Referring to Mizoram, he said there was a single group and peace followed after negotiation with them.

Regarding Achik National Volunteer Council, demanding a separate Garo state, Mr Sangma said with the ceasefire declared, Nagaland infiltrators had grown in number; this made the situation more difficult.

No to BJP: Mr Purno A Sangma today ruled out speculations about his joining the BJP adding that his party would soon emerge as the only alternative at the national level.

Mr Sangma iterated that he would never join the Congress — with or without Mrs Sonia Gandhi at the helm of affairs.

Pande will remain in Patna, says Advani

Governor's decision to be debated, voted upon in LS

Loss of Bihar not exactly a setback: PM

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 13

HOME MINISTER L.K. Advani today rejected the Opposition's demand for recall of Bihar Governor Vinod Pande, even as Lok Sabha Speaker G.M.C. Balayogi admitted a motion under Rule 184 to discuss the Governor's action in installing a minority NDA government. This rule entails voting after a debate.

Mr Advani, replying to an acrimonious debate in the Rajya Sabha on the Bihar developments, asserted that the Governor had not done anything illegal or unconstitutional in inviting Mr Nitish Kumar to form the government after the fractured verdict in the State Assembly polls.

The Opposition, dissatisfied with the Home Minister's reply, staged a noisy walkout. Leader of the Opposition Manmohan Singh took exception to Mr Advani quoting from the Governor's letter, saying the Congress had not communicated its decision to support the RJD till the night of March 2, a day prior to his invitation to Mr Nitish Kumar. Dr Singh challenged the Governor's claim.

"The Governor has misled you," Dr Singh told Mr Advani as he quoted Bihar Congress leader Sadanand Singh as having told Mr Pande that the Congress had taken no decision as of then (night of March 2) to support any group.

This contention infuriated the

Opposition benches, who demanded that Mr Advani table the Governor's letter, which he did.

The government side had reasons to heave a sigh of relief that Dr Singh's motion, moved on March 7, was taken up under Rule 170 instead of Rule 168. The latter would have entailed voting and the government, being in a minority in the Upper House, could have suffered a moral defeat.

During the debate, the Opposition members raised a series of pointed queries on why the Governor did not call the single largest party (RJD) and why he failed to set any time-limit for submission of list of supporters by rival candidates.

In the Lok Sabha, the Speaker admitted RJD member Raghuvansh Prasad Singh's motion to discuss the Governor's conduct under Rule 184, which entails voting at the end of the debate. The date and time of the debate is to be decided by the Business Advisory Committee. As the political situation in Bihar had changed since the notice he gave on March 8, Mr Singh gave a fresh notice this morning to demand the recall of the Governor.

Deputy leader of Congress Madhavrao Scindia stated that the manner in which the Bihar issue had been handled by the Governor had led to reservations being expressed by newspapers, intelligentsia and politicians.

See also Page 9

New Delhi, March 13

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee today said that developments in Bihar were "not exactly a setback" for the NDA and expressed apprehensions whether the new RJD government would be stable in the wake of the "unclear" political scenario in the state.

"It is not exactly a setback. Governor had invited us but we could not prove (our majority) on the floor of the house. Now another government has been formed," he said in his first public comment on the resignation of NDA leader Nitish Kumar as Chief Minister of Bihar shortly before the confidence vote last week.

Meanwhile in Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK president M.Karunanidhi said the Bihar Governor and the NDA leadership had taken a "hasty decision" by inviting Samata Party leader and Union Minister Nitish Kumar to form a government there.

Addressing a Press conference, he said a clear picture would emerge only after Mrs Rabri Devi proves her majority.

On new RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan's demand for total change in the Constitution, he said different people had expressed different views on it. (Agencies)

Assam DGP heads action group on ISI activities

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, March 13. — The Assam government has set up a five-member action group under the state director-general of police, Mr P V Sumant, to take stock of the growing activities of the ISI in Assam and take necessary action.

Informing this during zero hour, Mr Mahanta said that the Inter-Service Intelligence's agenda for Assam included training and arming militant outfits, spreading Islamic fundamentalism and carrying out acts of sabotage on vital installations like oil refineries.

He said that the action group was set up on 6 March.

The matter of ISI threat to the country's sovereignty, its designs on Assam and its nexus with Ulfa was raised by the AGP member, Mr Dilip Saikia Sonowal.

Mr Mahanta told the House that of late several Muslim fundamentalist organisations have come up and the dreaded Harkat-ul-Mujahideen had also stepped up its activities in the state.

The chief minister said that the United Liberation Front of Asom has had links with the ISI since 1990. A militant, now in prison, had confessed during interrogation that he had himself taken the first batch of Ulfa rebels to Pakistan for training.

Over 250 United Liberation Front of Asom militants have received training in Pakistan, he said.

According to him, the Pakistan high commission in Dhaka facilitated the rebels'

movement to Pakistan after they reached Bangladesh.

The *Washington Post* is said to have quoted a US government official to say that the ISI was helping various militant outfits of the North-east, including the Ulfa, by way of training and providing them with arms.

Mr Mahanta said that the state government has been saying the same thing for a long time and now the international community had also accepted it as a fact that the ISI was helping militant outfits in the North-east.

'Employees free to quit':

Mr Mahanta today said that state government employees who were not happy with the salary they were getting were free to seek voluntary retirement.

Stating this during zero hour, Mr Mahanta said that the government was not in a position to accept the employees' demand for further hike in salaries as the financial situation was very poor.

A Congress member had raised the matter of employees' agitation and the arrest of the Sadou Assam Karmachari Parishad leader, Mr Charan Deka, recently.

The chief minister said that Mr Deka had cordial relations with some militant outfit and was trying to disrupt the functioning of the government at their behest.

He said the government had definite proof of the SAKP leader's links with militants.



Mahanta: 'Ulfa has links with ISI'

GET ULFA NOW

Procrastination will prove costly

THE Governor of Assam, Lt-General SK Sinha is caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. That he now wants to go hammer and tongs against Ulfa suggests he has run out of bait. It was clear that he was being naive in thinking that they would respond to his overtures. Daylight dawns after the brutal murder of a minister and fresh belligerence. Ulfa leaders spurned the Governor's offer of safe passage. Gestures like visiting the Ulfa chief's ailing father, were interpreted as a sign of weakness, besides Sinha is no Gandhi! The surrender of a number of cadres, thanks to army operations, has not made much difference, the outfit's firepower remains intact, if it has not increased with ISI backing. The Governor and Mahanta are responsible for the turn of events. Had they taken an unequivocal stand after the army gained the upper hand by driving militants to neighbouring countries in 1998, they would have been better placed. Since attacks on ministers are a challenge to authority they must act decisively.

The Governor's speech claims that after he assumed office in 1996 militancy has been contained. Admittedly, there are fewer killings but General Sinha cannot ignore the fact that he has witnessed at least four attacks on ministers. He must remind himself that it is not a good idea to enter a popularity contest; the carrot-and-stick policy has not paid off. There is no possibility of a negotiated settlement with Ulfa hardliners. The danger posed by Ulfa and Bodo militants, reportedly holed up in neighbouring countries, is real and must be met firmly. The Centre should consider Sinha's plea for measures to cut off support to insurgents from outside the country.

THE STATESMAN
15 MAR 2000

Truce ordered to get Bodos talking

Efforts on to bring other N-E groups around: Advani

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 15

HT-1 16/3

THE CENTRE has suspended its anti-insurgency operations against Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) in Assam with immediate effect. The truce is likely to pave way for a dialogue with the militant outfit.

Making an identical statement in both the Houses of Parliament, Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani said the decision had been taken to create a congenial atmosphere for talks between the militants and the Centre so as to find a peaceful solution to the long-standing Bodo problem.

The Home Minister said efforts were on to convince other militant outfits, which were active in the North-East, to suspend their "violent and unlawful" activities. He reiterated the Centre's resolve to enter into peaceful negotiations with the outlaws, though within the parameters of the Indian Constitution.

Mr Advani informed the members that the BLT had suspended its operations against the Army and para-military forces, including the state police, following the government's offer.

Referring to the history of militancy in Assam and its adjoining areas, the Home Minister said activities of various militant groups had seriously disturbed public order, leading to enormous loss of life and property, besides cessation of the economic development of the sensitive region. "The people are fed up with violence and they yearn for peace," he said.

Mr Advani said the BLT had agreed to abjure the path of violence in both letter and spirit and refrain from indulging in any unlawful activities even if the Centre announced suspension of operations against it.

Seeking clarifications in the Rajya Sabha, Mr Santosh Bagrodia (Cong) said the BLT was a small group while several bigger outfits were still active. He said the militants were getting shelter in camps in neighbouring countries like Bangladesh. The government, he said, should learn a lesson from Israel and take steps to "liquidate" the camps.

Mr Drupad Borgohain (CPI) said the Bodos were only keen to protect their ethnic identity, like several other tribal groups. He said there should be no division of Assam and the government could create autonomous councils to satisfy the demands of the people there.

Mr Swaraj Kaushal (Haryana Vikas Party) said the government should clarify how long the operations would remain suspended.

The minister told the Elders that the government's "invitation" for talks was for all militant groups and not just the BLT. The government would not compromise on the condition that the talks had to be within the parameters

of the Constitution. Mr Advani said the talks had not been fruitless and some "good responses" had been received by the government during its dialogue with the BLT. He assured Mr Bagrodia that there would be no harassment of relatives of kidnap-victims if they reached settlements with the militants for release of the victims.



THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

16 MAR 2000

Pact to end N-E border dispute

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, March 15: Assam and Meghalaya today signed an agreement to resolve the pending border dispute amicably and strengthen the age-old friendly ties between the two states.

The agreement, signed by Assam chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his Meghalaya counterpart E.K.Mawlong, said field demarcation will resume in those sectors of the interstate border where there is no dispute. In case of other sectors, chief secretaries of the two states will thrash out the contentious issues within six months.

The decision, arrived at by the chief secretaries, will be discussed by the chief ministers of the respective states before a final settlement. The chief ministers have agreed to make a joint spot survey of blocks I and II in Karbi Anglong district.

They also agreed to co-operate on counter-insurgency operations in the two states. Both the chief ministers were accompanied by a number of their Cabinet colleagues and senior officials.

The last chief ministerial-level meeting on border dispute was held in June 1995 between the then chief ministers Hiteswar Saikia of Assam and Salseng C. Marak of Meghalaya. Mawlong, who has been a vocal critic of the establishment's inability to settle the issue,

1-8 16/3
wasted no time in getting down to business. As soon as he was sworn in last week, he contacted his Assam counterpart for a meeting on the issue.

The Assam-Meghalaya boundary dispute dates back to 1971, when Meghalaya was carved out of Assam. Many areas were left undemarcated in the hurry to expedite the birth of the hill state.

The following years were marked by skirmishes and unsavoury incidents, allegations and counter-allegations of encroachment, timber smuggling and growing criminal activities in the disputed areas.

In 1991, the two states agreed to settle the problem in a spirit of "mutual understanding" after Assam agreed to remove its police outposts from the disputed areas. A three-point formula suggested a joint survey of the disputed boundary area by the survey teams of the two states and the Surveyor of India and putting up of temporary markers following which villagers were to be consulted in which state they wanted to be.

However, Assam unilaterally built fixed permanent concrete boundary pillars along the temporary markers in the Garo Hill sector in 1992.

The pillars had to be destroyed after Meghalaya protested. Most of the Garo Hill sector remained disputed since then.

THE TELEGRAPH

16 MAR 2000

Assam, Meghalaya CMs join hands to combat insurgency

16/3 P.P. Singh ET-2

GUWAHATI 15 MARCH

NEWLY APPOINTED Meghalaya chief minister E.K. Mawlong and Assam chief minister P.K. Mahanta on Wednesday agreed to increase cooperation between them to fight the insurgency in the region. The chief ministers have decided to cooperate in the wake of the insurgents groups like Ulfa, NDFB expanding their presence in states like Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh apart from Assam.

In an exclusive interview with ET, both the chief ministers at the state guest house in Khanapara said both states facing problems which need immediate attention. They said these issues have been put in the cold storage by earlier governments for decades, specially issues like the dispute on the marking of inter state border.

Talking about the border issue, the chief ministers said they have decided to solve the vexed problem in next six months by immediately starting off with field demarcation of those sectors of the inter-



Meghalaya CM E.K. Mawlong with his Assamese counterpart P.K. Mahanta in Guwahati on Wednesday

Caroline Singh

state border where there are no areas of differences between the two states, a work which had been suspended earlier. The two chief ministers agreed to hold chief secretary level meetings continuously and the recommendations made by the two chief secretaries would be again discussed by the two chief ministers two arrive at a solution.

The Economic Times

16 MAR 2000

INSIDE N-E: PEACE IS THE FLAVOUR OF THE MOMENT

Centre suspends military operations against Bodos

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 15 MARCH

THE CENTRE said on Wednesday that all military, para-military, police operations against the Bodo Liberation Tigers in Assam must be suspended with immediate effect. The Centre also suggested opening of negotiations on the Bodoland demand. This is the first step in the direction of initiating peace process in Assam.

The bilateral suspension of operations follows talks between the Centre and Bodo leaders. Later, the Assam government too was taken into confidence. The formal peace negotiations, to be overseen by a joint monitoring group, will be held within the country as per the Constitutional provisions.

In a statement tabled in both the Houses of the Parliament on Wednesday, Union home minister L.K. Advani said the Bodos

had, in keeping with the Prime Minister's 1998 invitation to Northeastern militant groups to participate in peace talks, suspended its operations from July 14, 1999.

"The Bodos... also agreed to completely abjure the path of violence in both letter and spirit and not to indulge in any unlawful activities if the Indian government announced suspension of operations against it," he said, before announcing the Centre's reciprocal gesture to this move.

The bilateral peace agreement, the time-period for which was not specified, will come as a big relief to oil companies which operate in the Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) region. The Bodo militants had often blown up pipelines and targeted refineries, and had also claimed responsibilities for killings, ambushes, extortion and kidnappings in the Kokrajhar,

Bongaigaon, Nalbari, Barpeta, Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Dhemaji districts. The Bodos have promised to follow up the Centre's peace initiative by:

- completely abjuring the path of violence;
- not engaging in violent or unlawful activities like killings, injuries, kidnappings, extortions, intimidation, etc;
- agreeing to abide by the Constitution of India and the laws of the land.

The Centre — whose reciprocal suspension of operations against the Bodos comes exactly nine months after the Tigers unilaterally shunned violence against the army, para-military forces and the Assam police — had earlier indicated its willingness to open peace negotiations by deferring the re-imposition of ban on the Bodos under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, upto July 8.

The Economic Times

16 MAR 2000

Rabri well-placed to face trust vote

By Our Staff Correspondent

PATNA, MARCH 15. The four-day old Rabri Devi Government today displayed its strength by obtaining a vote-on-account for four months clearly indicating that it was well-placed to secure the confidence of the House tomorrow in deference to the directive of the Governor, Mr. V. C. Pande, to prove her majority within 10 days of assuming power.

This is the second time in less than a week that the NDA has shied away from a trial of strength inside the Assembly making a mockery of their claims before the Governor that they enjoyed majority support and would prove the same on the floor of the House.

The former Chief Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar, did not put his trust motion to vote and today the

NDA did not avail itself of the opportunity that came their way in the form of the division they could have pressed for during the adoption of the vote-on-account for four months for the period April, 2000 to July, 2000.

Instead of staying in the House and taking the battle into the enemy camp, the NDA boycotted the debate and the voting on the ground that they were opposed to the RJD Government first seeking a vote-on-account without proving its majority.

The NDA had no compunction in staging the boycott as it considered it as the only way of avoiding further loss of face. The NDA leaders were divided on the course of action to be adopted during tomorrow's trust motion that the Chief Minister will be moving.

A section of the NDA leaders ar-

gued against pressing a division on Mrs. Rabri Devi's trust motion fearing that the outcome would only expose the hollowness of the claim they had made before the Governor that they had the support of 151 MLAs. These NDA leaders feared that more than them it would be the Governor who would be put in the wrong for taking their claim on face value and not ascertaining it if their support were to be less than 151.

The NDA leaders were equally apprehensive that the RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, himself might demand a division to establish his claim and vindicate his stand that the Governor had acted with a bias in inviting Mr. Kumar to form the government even when it was clear that the NDA lacked majority support.

The RID-led coalition has claimed the support of 164 MLAs

which it had put at 162 while staking a claim to form the government soon after the fall of the Nitish Kumar Ministry on Friday last. Mrs. Rabri Devi was sworn-in on Saturday last.

In a house with an effective strength of 322, the RID has 123 members, the Congress(I) 22 (excluding the Speaker), the BSP five, the CPI(M) and KSP two each with 10 independents supporting the combine.

The other opposition parties did not join the NDA's boycott distancing themselves from it. Both the CPI and the CPI-ML later walked out while the government was replying to the debate. While the CPI seems keen to vote against tomorrow's trust motion, the CPI-ML seemed likely to abstain, which would only be to the benefit of the treasury benches.

166 MLAS SAY 'AYE' TO RJD; NDA BOYCOTT

Rabri wins trust vote

By K. Balchand

PATNA, MARCH 16. The Bihar Chief Minister and Rashtriya Janata Dal leader, Mrs. Rabri Devi, today comfortably proved her majority in the State Legislative Assembly with as many as 166 MLAs voting in favour of her trust motion.

Only four members voted against it while the National Democratic Alliance boycotted the process opposing the procedure adopted.

The five-day old Rabri Devi Government carried the day on the strength of its own party (123), the Congress(I) (22 excluding the Speaker), the BSP (5), the KSP (2), the CPI-M(2), the MCC (1), and Independents (11). At least four independents changed their loyalties today in favour of the ruling RJD-led combine.

While the CPI(ML) abstained from voting, the CPI was the only party to vote against the motion. Four of its members cast their votes against the Government, but one abstained.

Two, MLAs, "absconding", did not turn up and three legislators in jail, who were present in the House during the debate on the motion, stayed away. All the five members had extended their support to the NDA earlier.

Thus, the effective strength of the Assembly, when the motion was put to vote, was 310 and with the half-way mark being 156, the Rabri Devi Government secured 10 votes more. The RJD president and Mrs. Rabri Devi's husband, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, managed the floor well for his party.

On the other hand, when viewed against the effective strength of the House (322 with



The Bihar Chief Minister, Mrs. Rabri Devi, offering sweets to her husband and the RJD chief, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, after winning the vote of confidence in the Assembly on Thursday.

— Photo: Ranjeet Kumar.

two vacancies), the margin is slender with just four votes above the requisite for a simple majority, the NDA leaders boycotted the voting protesting the Speaker, Mr. Sadanand Singh's decision calling for a division which provided for recording each member's vote.

The Chair justified its action stressing that all the parties had issued whips and it was also necessary to record the votes for the enforcement of the Anti-defection law.

The NDA members insisted that instead of a division the Speaker should have resorted to a head count in the House.

The CPI, which had opposed the trust motion, did not dispute the Chair's ruling and entered the

cussion the Lok Sabha was to take up over the Governor's conduct under Rule 184 which allowed for the issue to be put to a vote. The NDA had once again avoided a trial of strength admitting that the numbers were never on its side.

During the debate on the motion, Mr. Yadav questioned the Governor's role, charging that he had not only discouraged the RJD from submitting its papers but had all through acted in a manner to usher in an NDA government in the State.

He demanded that the papers that the RJD had submitted to the Governor be examined and action taken against the Governor.

Sonia phones Laloo

No sooner was the result announced, the AICC(I) president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi had a telephonic talk with Mr. Yadav, who thanked her for the support and described the victory of Mrs. Rabri Devi as the victory of secular forces. The target now was "New Delhi" and he would ensure that she was in the "chair" there soon.

The NDA continued its 'dharna' even when the House resumed to take up the third supplementary demands. The Speaker adjourned the House after the demands were tabled to meet only at the fag-end to pass the demands amid the commotion. The House was adjourned sine die eventually.

The NDA leaders, the former Chief Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar and the Leader of Opposition, Mr. Sushil Kumar Modi, said they would call on the Governor to record their protest and also move a no-confidence motion against the Speaker for his alleged partisan role.

Centre seeks foolproof Bodo ceasefire rules

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, March 16. — The experience with the National Socialist Council of Nagalim has made the Centre wiser and it will now "not leave anything to interpretation" while framing the ground rules for the ceasefire with the Bodo Liberation Tigers.

The government announced cessation of operations against the BLT yesterday after the outfit's leadership promised "in writing" to give up unlawful activities like killings, kidnappings, extortion, etc.

There had been much bad blood between the Centre and the NSCN over the interpretation of the ground rules for the

ceasefire with the Naga outfit. The NSCN has now called for a review of the rules.

For instance, the NSCN holds that the ceasefire is only with the security forces. This implies the outfit is free to hit out at, say, cadres of other underground organisations in the state or ordinary people with whom the outfit doesn't see eye to eye.

Kidnappings and extortion too have continued after the ceasefire came into effect.

The NSCN, of course, has denied the allegations, including the one that it was involved in the failed attempt on the life of the Nagaland chief minister, Mr SC Jamir, last year.

"We are not going to have a

repeat of the situation while drafting the rules for the ceasefire with the BLT. We have told the BLT leadership categorically that all the laws of the land shall prevail and we are going to put it down in black and white to avoid any 'convenient' interpretation of the rules by any side," the joint secretary (North-east) in the Union home ministry, Mr GK Pillai, said over telephone today.

He said that with the NSCN too it was agreed that its members would not carry out any unlawful activity. "But it was not explicitly laid down in writing and they have time and again taken advantage of the lapse.

"The idea, after all, is to create an atmosphere of peace that is conducive to negotiations." Among the rules being contemplated is one which will require the BLT to inform Assam police about the location of its members so that operations are not carried out in those areas. Besides, as in Nagaland, a ceasefire monitoring group will be set up which will enforce the truce and take action against either side for any violation of the ground rules.

The monitoring group will have representatives from the BLT, the Assam government and various security-related agencies. The rules will be finalised in the next few days.

NDA questions clean government pledge

Pande's move puts Sonia in Bihar bind

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI/PATNA, March 17. — Mrs Sonia Gandhi is again in a bind over Bihar, with the Governor sanctioning the CBI to prosecute Mrs Rabri Devi and Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav, and the NDA turning the heat on the Congress to oust the Chief Minister.

The Congress president and her aides are working on options to save the party a political embarrassment as it has already joined the RJD government. One such option is to demand Mrs Rabri Devi's resignation if the CBI chargesheets her and Mr Yadav, and mount tacit pressure on the RJD to appoint a Congress Chief Minister.

However, till the CBI files the charge-sheet, the party intends to flay the Governor's move as "politically motivated and continue to disrupt parliamentary proceedings after the recess". The party is also likely to demand Governor Mr VC Pande's recall.

The Opposition, led by the Congress, has met the President, Mr KR Narayanan, and sought his intervention. But sources said all this "sympathy and support for the RJD might continue only till the charge-sheet is filed". The Congress president would then demand the Chief Minister's

replacement.

Aware that the RJD government is surviving on its support, the Congress, after having lost one state after another, might try to gain the upper hand in Bihar.

Sensing this, the BJP yesterday stated the "honeymoon" between the RJD and the Congress would be shortlived. Justifying the Governor's move, the party spokesman, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu, today said if Mr Pande had sanctioned the prosecution, the Chief Minister had no moral right to continue in office. The Centre did not play any role in the matter, he added.

The BJP Leader of Opposition, Mr Sushil Kumar Modi, and the Samata Party spokesman, Mr PK Sinha, said the Chief Minister had no right to stay in office even for a minute in the wake of the CBI deciding to chargesheet her.

NDA leaders also dared the Congress to clearly state its position on the issue. "In the agreement between the Congress and the RJD, Mrs Gandhi had taken an undertaking from Mr Yadav to ensure a corruption-free government," Mr Modi said.

NDA leaders said the Congress should now make it clear how it would go about ensuring a corruption-free government when the CBI was all set

to chargesheet the Chief Minister herself in a corruption case. "The CBI has made Mrs Rabri Devi a co-accused in the DA case (5A/98) for aiding and abetting the illegal earnings of her husband." The alliance is giving the "final shape" to the mass agitation to oust the "corrupt" Rabri Devi government, they said.

Mr Yadav maintained the BJP was using the CBI as a "political tool" to get even with adversaries. The RJD chief said he and Mrs Rabri Devi had declared the source of their assets in the income tax returns they filed. "We have also disputed slapping of Rs 42-lakh fine on us by the IT. There is no logic for CBI to probe the DA case on us when the matter is pending with the IT."

He ruled out Mrs Rabri Devi's resignation. "The people have given RJD the mandate to rule despite all the machinations of the communal BJP and the CBI."

Jharkhand rider: Congress MLAs from South Bihar today threatened to withdraw support from the RJD government if Mr Yadav reversed his stand on the Jharkhand statehood issue. The seven Congress MLAs from the region said they had agreed to support the RJD on the condition that it would support the Bihar Reorganisation Bill, adds PTI.

THE STATESMAN

18 MAR 2000

Bodos ensured more autonomy

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, March 17. — The Centre is "quite determined" to grant enough autonomy to the Bodoland Autonomous Council to help it function effectively, but statehood for the Bodos is not on its agenda.

A Union home ministry official said that now that the government had announced a ceasefire with the Bodo Liberation Tigers, the outfit — which has been demanding a separate state for the Bodos on the Brahmaputra's north bank — will be invited for a dialogue.

He said other groups that share the BLT's objective, such as the All Bodo Students' Union which spearheads the statehood movement and the People's Democratic Front, too will be invited for discussions.

"We are quite determined to give the BAC enough autonomy to help it function in an effective manner," the official said. "But statehood is out."

The Union home minister, Mr

LK Advani, too told the Rajya Sabha yesterday that the Centre will not create more states in the North-east.

The BAC was born out of the Bodoland Accord signed in February 1993. But the Absu, which was a signatory, soon lost faith in the council.

The Absu then reverted to its demand for a state for without it the "hopes and aspirations of the Bodos cannot be fulfilled".

The official said that in the first phase, discussions will be held with individual organisations. "In the next round, we will have joint discussions where all the groups, including the BLT, will be present."

He said the NDFB, another Bodo terrorist group, has not yet indicated its willingness for a dialogue.

"They (NDFB) will probably wait and watch how the ceasefire and dialogue with the BLT proceed before making any decision," the official said. "If they can be isolated, hopefully, they too will see reason."

THE STATESMAN

18 MAR 2000

Offer to Bodo militants

THE SUSPENSION of anti-insurgency operations against the Bodo ultras in Assam is a step the Centre should have taken long ago. For long the Union Government chose to deal only with the moderate Bodo leadership even though it was the extremists who called the shots. Unlike the overtures to the ULFA, which often spurned the Centre's peace offer and raised secessionist demands, very little effort was made to bring the Bodo groups to the negotiating table. True, the Centre's efforts led to the February 1993 accord, but it failed to solve the Bodo imbroglio. It was an effort to solve the Bodo tangle on the cheap. While the Bodo militant groups rejected it out of hand and the moderates became disillusioned, the Centre and the Assam Government worked at cross purposes. As the Bodo violence continued unabated, the State Government organised stage-managed surrender of the lower ranking leaders.

The Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) has responded positively to the peace initiative and has agreed to abjure violence. The only difficulty is that the BLT, today, is the weakest among the ultras. What is needed at this stage is to extend the offer to two other banned Bodo outfits — the Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF) and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). A few months ago the two outfits came under one umbrella. While one group has been demanding a separate Bodoland State within India, the other group has made secessionist demands.

The Government has done well to clarify that the invitation for talks is applicable to other groups as well. Despite the ability of the Bodo ultras to hit where it hurts, the extremists do not enjoy the kind of support among the Bodo people as they once did. Earlier they were seen as fighting for a noble cause, today such a perception has changed thanks to their senseless violence and acts of extortion. The experience of the north-eastern States suggests that signing accords with some groups to the exclusion of others is hardly the best way to bring about peace. What is important is to sustain the momentum created by the Centre's overtures towards Naga militants. The resolution of the Naga and the Bodo problems will have a sobering influence on the ongoing movements for autonomy, statehood or outright secessionism.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 MAR 2000

Militants line up 35 Sikhs, gun them down

The Times of India News Service
SRINAGAR: In the worst-ever massacre since militancy erupted in Jammu & Kashmir in the early '90s, a group of heavily armed militants killed 35 members of the Sikh community at Chatisinghpura village in the Mattan block of Anantnag district late on Monday night. All those killed were male.

One woman later died of shock on seeing the bodies. **J N & Co.**
 The incident took place a few hours before U.S. President Bill Clinton began his official visit to India.

Tension gripped Jammu, following which curfew has been imposed in the state's winter capital.

According to the police control room at Anantnag, the militants came to the village at about 9 p.m. and forced the male members of the community to line up. They then shot them at point-blank range, killing 30 persons on the spot. The village in south Kashmir has 250 Sikh families.

Inspector-general of police (Kashmir zone) Ashok Bhan said the militants, numbering between 40 and 50, descended on the village and asked residents to come out of their houses. The male members were segregated from the women and made to line up in an open field before being shot. The militants then escaped to the adjoining forests and mountains, where army jawans have now fanned out.

While 30 persons died on the spot, five succumbed to their injuries later. Twelve persons, who were injured, have been admitted to hospitals in Srinagar and Anantnag.

According to the police, the militants were dressed in the uniform

worn by these security forces and gave the impression that a crackdown was being conducted on militants suspected to be hiding in the village. The militants spoke in Urdu. The police suspect the militants may be from Afghanistan.

A team of senior army officers has reached the village, which has been cordoned off. No militant organisation has claimed responsibility for the massacre so far.

At least six J&K ministers, led by minister of state for home M.H. Lone, have reached the site of the massacre. Many Union ministers,

a separatist leader, Shabir Shah, at Lal Chowk here along with his colleagues of the Freedom Party.

Senior home ministry officials have rushed to Anantnag following the gunning down of 35 members of Sikh community. While no militant group has yet claimed the responsibility, home ministry sources blamed the dastardly act on foreign mercenary organisations Lashkar-e-Toiba and Hizbul-Mujahideen, both sponsored by Pakistan's ISI.

The killings follow the gunning down of five truck drivers in south Kashmir on February 28. The mili-

had tried to see that the Kashmir Valley is cleansed of this particular community. Now the objective seems to be to see that the Sikhs also begin the process of migration," he said.

Chief minister Farooq Abdullah spoke to the home minister on telephone. The two discussed security measures to be taken after the carnage as the authorities feared about a backlash and fallout, sources said.

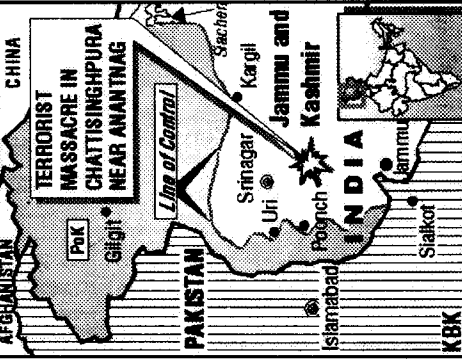
Farooq Abdullah, who left mid-way through the Prime Minister's official lunch for visiting U.S. President Clinton

'Lashkar-e-Toiba behind massacre'

NEW DELHI: A group comprising the Pakistani mercenary outfit Lashkar-e-Toiba and the Hizbul Mujahideen had carried out Monday night's massacre of 35 Sikhs in Anantnag, national security advisor Brajesh Mishra said here on Tuesday.

Mr Mishra told journalists that the government had evidence that the militant group was led by top Lashkar commander Abu Mahab.

He said Hizbul Mujahideen militants involved in the attack belonged to the Maulvi faction. (PTI)



Militants storm BSF camp in Srinagar

SRINAGAR: Two militants armed with sophisticated weapons stormed a Border Security Force camp at Chibnapora in Srinagar on Tuesday evening.

The militants, suspected to be a suicide squad, opened heavy fire and exploded grenades while forcing their entry into a small-scale industrial corporation building housing BSF troops, official sources said.

They stormed the camp at about 6 p.m. and intense firing and explosions were heard. (PTI)

tants attacked a police station with grenades and rockets, injuring five security personnel, among them a police official, and also torched the house of a National Conference activist in Baramulla district early Tuesday morning.

Reacting strongly, home minister L K Advani described it as "grim tragedy". There appeared to be a "deliberate design" to "cleanse" the Valley of all minorities, Advani said. It was not a random kind of killing but there was a "deliberate design" behind it, he told the press.

"Till now, the militants had targeted the Hindu community and

Punjab CM Parkash Singh Badal has strongly condemned the massacre of innocent persons belonging to Sikh community in Anantnag. Describing the ghastly act as "most tragic and heinous crime against humanity, CM said that our century-old heritage is wedded to mutual trust and harmonious living and any conspiracy to create wedge between different communities should be collectively countered.

Mr Badal has appealed to the people of the country and Sikh in particular to stay calm in this moment of crisis and maintain their peace and amity.

NDA concedes post of speaker in Bihar to oppn.

I will prove my strength on Friday: Nitish Kumar *Foes gear up for second assault on NDA citadel*

The Times of India News Service

PATNA: The state assembly elected Congress member Sadanand Singh as its speaker by a voice vote on Thursday, after the NDA conceded the speakership to the RJD-sponsored Congress nominee.

Earlier, Mr Nitish Kumar, who is scheduled to seek a confidence vote on Friday, had nominated JD(U)'s Gajendra Prasad Himanshu for the post, but he told a hurriedly convened press conference that in order to maintain "healthy parliamentary convention" his alliance had decided to back Mr Singh.

The decision was taken at a high-level meeting attended by top NDA leaders, including union ministers Ramvilas Paswan, Sharad Yadav and BJP national vice-president Kailashpati Mishra.

Shortly afterwards, the state assembly met and unanimously elected Mr Singh as speaker of the 324-member house. RJD chief Laloo Prasad Yadav proposed Mr Singh's name which was seconded by a former RJD minister Shanker Prasad Tekriwal and the motion was carried unanimously amid thumping of desks by the ruling and opposition benches.

Mr Nitish Kumar, however, asserted that backing Mr Singh for the office of speaker did not imply acceptance of defeat by the NDA and that the issue would be settled on Friday.

"I still command the majority and will prove it in the house on Friday", he claimed.

Despite, Mr Nitish Kumar's assertion, senior NDA sources conceded, on condition of anonymity, that the chances of their winning the trust vote were "very bleak."

Prospects of the Nitish Kumar ministry sailing through the confidence vote hinged primarily on a possible split in the 23-member CLP but RJD chief Laloo Prasad Yadav made peace with the disgruntled Congress MLAs hailing from the tribal areas in south Bihar by giving up his opposition to the creation of a separate state in the region. As a result, a few upper caste Congress MLAs, still unhappy about backing Mr Yadav's party again, found it difficult to cause a split.

With the assured support of 151 MLAs in a house with an effective strength of 322, Mr Nitish Kumar needs the support of 11 more MLAs from parties like the Congress (23), the BSP (5) and uncommitted independents. However, as the NDA members claimed, they had made only a tactical retreat, since the real battle was winning the confidence vote on Friday, for which they had a definite game plan.

The NDA, it is believed, had entered into a "deal and understanding" with the Congress, which, now, is left with 22 members after Mr Singh's election as speaker. The NDA camp has also been hoping that the CPI would abstain from voting on Friday.

Meanwhile, Mr Nitish Kumar has decided to appeal to the "conscience" of the members, when the confidence vote comes up, implying that he would seek their "conscience vote", like former prime minister Indira Gandhi did for the election of President V.V. Giri in 1969. "We will focus on the jungle raj and try to rouse their conscience for their conscience vote", Mr Nitish Kumar said.

By Smita Gupta

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Emboldened by its victory on the RSS issue, the opposition has now mounted a second assault on the NDA's citadel in Delhi.

Starting last Friday, it has been vigorously questioning — in Parliament and outside — the correctness of governor Vinod Pandey's "premature" decision to invite the NDA to form a government in Bihar.

Lending potency to this campaign are the BJP's partners itself. While Telugu Desam Party chief N. Chandrababu Naidu has said the RJD-CPM combine, as the single largest group, should have been invited to form the government, Janata Dal-United leader Ramkrishna Hegde has said the governor should have waited till one or the other group had the requisite numbers.

Such expressions of dissent is bad news for the BJP: For even its roll-back on the RSS issue was forced not so much by the opposition but by behind-the-scenes pressure from its own allies. MDMK chief Vaiko, for instance, expressed his happiness that the BJP had "listened to his advice" on the issue.

And on Thursday, even as the BJP tried to forget the RSS episode as a bad dream, the opposition scored its second victory in two days: The NDA withdrew its nominee for the speaker's post in the Bihar assembly.

Predictably, the Bihar events had an echo in Parliament: In the Rajya Sabha, opposition MPs demanded an immediate discussion on the issue, as this had been accepted by the chair.

In the Lok Sabha, opposition MPs smelling blood pressed for admission of an adjournment motion and some of them stormed the well of the House asking for the governor's head. Both houses had to be adjourned.

When the Lok Sabha met again at 2 p.m. and the chair allowed Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Yadav to raise the RSS issue, it was the ruling party's turn to force an adjournment, an indication of the frayed tempers and taut nerves on that side of the house.

Above all, it is the news from Bihar that has the BJP leadership worried. Reports from Patna suggest that chief minister Nitish Kumar is still sweating it out, desperately trying to get his arithmetic right.

The word is that he withdrew his candidate for speaker lest his hurriedly assembled coalition get knocked out in the first round itself.

The NDA is also finding it hard to explain how it plans to end "jungle raj" with the support of six MLAs who are actually behind bars.

Of these, four are independents while one belongs to the Samata Party and one to the JD-U.

After the speakership debacle, the BJP knows the game in Bihar has entered a dangerous phase.

The real fear is that in case Mr Nitish Kumar fails to make it, the NDA's fortress in Delhi, too, may just be breached.



Laloo Prasad



Nitish Kumar

Army guns down 5 N-E insurgents

23 5-11
FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, March 21: Troops operating in the Lower Assam districts shot dead five militants, including a hardcore activist of the banned Ulfa, in separate incidents in the past 24 hours.

Defence sources said the Army cordoned off a cluster of thatched dwellings in Amlaiguri near Kumarikata in Nalbari district yesterday. A militant on guard, who tried to flee after opening fire, was gunned down.

He has been identified as the self-styled lance corporal of the National Democratic Front of Boroland, Dahanu Basumatary alias Limpon Basumatary. A 9 mm pistol and some ammunition were seized from him.

The sources said a joint search party of the Army and police shot dead two more NDFB activists at Chudra Para gaon near Baihata Chariali in Kamrup district yesterday. "The patrol party was shot at by the two militants who were hiding in a bamboo grove. After a heavy exchange of fire, they were killed," an official said. They have been identified as Kamal and Badan Boro. A pistol was recovered from them, he added.

Security forces also shot dead another hardcore NDFB activist, Arun Boro at Saru Belbari near Rangiya today. A 9 mm revolver along with ammunition were recovered from him.

In Kamrup district, the Army shot dead Sadath Khali alias Baghi, a hardcore Ulfa militant at Balabari near Goreswar on the banks of river Puthimari, the sources said. Some live ammunition were also seized.

The Army, operating in trouble-torn Kokrajhar district, killed another hardcore NDFB activist at Ai Paoli gaon near Bengtol on March 19. Defence sources said a 9 mm loaded pistol with six rounds of ammunition, a magazine along with several extortion notes were seized from him. The troops also apprehended two other NDFB militants from the banks of Ai river. They have been identified as Bari Ram Mocha and Musan Hirod Borgiary.

THE TELEGRAPH

22 MAR 2000

5 Ulfa activists gunned down

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, March 22: The Army achieved a major breakthrough after it busted the mobile headquarters of the Saraighat Anchalik Parishad of the banned Ulfa in the city outskirts near Changsari this morning. Five hardcore activists were also gunned down. A woman died of a bullet injury after one of the militants fired at her accidentally.

Col. A.K. Singh of the 21 mountain division, who led the operation, said the Army cordoned off the Banmajha village where the militants were holed up. "The militants were caught off guard and they started firing. We fired back and finally killed them," Col. Singh said.

The encounter lasted more than 30 minutes. Those killed include self-styled finance secretary of the parishad Amulya Patowari alias Tariq Ali. The other four militants have been identified as self-styled action group commander of Hardatta Bir Datta Shakha of the outfit, Mukut Deka, recruiting officer of the parishad Govinda Deka alias Bullet, and two central committee members, Lakhikant Rabha and Mihir Deka.

Sources said the woman, a

local resident, died when Rabha's automatic gun went off while he was trying to flee.

Two AK-56 assault rifles, a 9 mm Browning pistol, a US-made revolver, a .303 pistol and a large quantity of ammunition were recovered from the slain rebels. Singh said the Army also recovered several incriminating documents and some books — *A Soldier Recalls* by Assam Governor Lt. Gen. (retd.) S.K. Sinha, *Assignment Jaffna* by Lt. Gen. S.S. Sandesh Pandey and *Indian Army After Independence* by Maj. Gen. K.C. Parwal from them.

Singh said Amulya Patowari was the banned outfit's main link with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). "He also masterminded the extortions in Kamrup and Darrang districts," Singh said. The militants were also involved in extortion in the capital, he added.

"Amulya Patowari's death will deal a blow to the Ulfa's extortion drive as well as its links with the ISI," he said.

Kamrup superintendent of police B.K. Mishra said preliminary investigations show the group was planning to launch a major offensive before the Ulfa raising day on April 7.

THE TELEGRAPH

23 MAR 2000

Assam warned of Ulfa strike on raising day

BY SIDDHARTHA
DUTTA KASHYAP

Guwahati, March 26: Intelligence agencies have warned of a major Ulfa offensive here on April 7, the day the outfit observes its 22nd "foundation day".

The Ulfa has chosen Guwahati as its "priority area" because it is the hub of VIPs. The government has been explicitly advised to leave nothing to chance in view of the "impending danger" to the lives of some politicians and security officials.

Four ministers in the Prafulla Kumar Mahanta Cabinet are believed to be on the Ulfa's "hit list". Two IPS officials are also at risk of being targeted in the run-up to the outfit's "foundation day".

Transport minister Pradip Hazarika, agriculture minister Chandra Mohan Patowary, municipal administration minister Biraj Sarma and sericulture minister Ramendra Narayan Kalita have already been advised to restrict their movements and remain alert, a source said.

Sarma survived an assassination attempt by the Ulfa on the eve of Lok Sabha elections on February 11, 1998. He was shot at by four motorcycle borne Ulfa rebels in the Silpukhuri area.

Though Patowary is yet to be targeted, his brother was killed by Ulfa rebels in the city.

"We have definite information that the Ulfa leadership has already ordered an offensive, including attempts on the lives of four Cabinet ministers," an intelligence source said.

Some surrendered Ulfa ac-

tivists also figure on the Ulfa "hit list". Chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta convened a meeting to review security arrangements in the state immediately after being apprised of the Ulfa's gameplan.

"A red alert has been sounded and instructions issued to take all precautionary measures," a source said. Security officials said the five militants who were killed in an encounter with the Army near Changsari on March 22 were planning to target VIPs and senior police officials in the city on the eve of the outfit's "foundation day".

The slain rebels included self-styled finance secretary of the Ulfa's Saraighat anchalik parishad Tariq Ali alias Amulya Patowari and "action group commander" Mukut Deka. Ali was also the outfit's "main ISI linkman".

Kamrup superintendent of police B.K.Mishra said the Ulfa suffered a major setback when the four militants were killed. He said these militants had been given the responsibility of carrying out acts of sabotage in the city next month.

Director-general of police P.V. Sumant admitted that there was a possibility of Ulfa rebels indulging in violence here on April 7, but said the police and paramilitary were on red alert.

Additional superintendent of police (city) P.K.Dutta echoed Sumant's views, saying that security had been beefed up and there was nothing to be alarmed about. He said raids were being carried out in suspected rebel hideouts in various parts of the city.

THE TELEGRAPH
27 MAR 2000

Bhutan trade jitters shield Ulfa camps

BY RAJIB BORAH

Guwahati, March 26: Bhutanese security forces will find it difficult to evict the Ulfa from their country as the camps of the rebel outfit are spread over a number of *dzongkhags* (districts).

The Ulfa has set up well-entrenched camps along the Assam-Bhutan border stretching from Kokrajhar in the west to Darrang in the east. "Any operation to evict the Ulfa will have to be on a large scale and the Bhutanese government fears such operations may have wide-ranging ramifications," highly-placed intelligence sources said today.

Ulfa's chief political commissar Mintu Dutta, who is planning to sever ties with the outfit, cor-

roborated this. The Ulfa was taking advantage of the Bhutanese government's fear that any action against them would hamper trade, he added.

The Bhutanese home minister had informed the National Assembly last year that action against the Ulfa may lead to closing of trade and communication links through Assam.

He added that the 8th plan development programme would be disrupted and people of Sarpang, Tsirang, Dagana, Zhemgang, Trongsa, Bumthang, Samdrup Jongkhar, Pemagatshel, Trashigang, Trashi Yangtse, Mongar and Lhuentse dzongkhags would be affected.

The camps are known by the names of the neighbouring dis-

tricts in Assam. "When one speaks of the Nalbari camp, he is referring to the one across the border from Nalbari," Dutta said. Likewise, there are Barpeta, Kamrup and Darrang camps. There is also a camp known as Bongaigaon, which is a misnomer since this district does not share its border with Bhutan, Dutta said. The camps are regularly shifted from one place to another, he added.

In some places there are clusters of camps but all are named after the nearest district in Assam, he said. "While the GHQ (general headquarters) is situated across the Nalbari border the CHQ (central headquarters) is across the Kamrup border," he said.

THE TELEGRAPH
27 MAR 2000

Bonus for peaceful N-E States

Agartala, March 27

THE PLANNING Commission has formulated a special scheme of peace bonus for those North-eastern States that are not getting security-related expenditure to tackle militancy.

Mizoram will be the first State to get the bonus, said Union Home Minister LK Advani after laying the foundation stone for the new capital complex here.

Advani, who arrived here today on a two-day visit, said since there is no insurgency in four of the eight North-eastern States, including Sikkim, the Centre does not allocate any security-related expenditure for them. Hence, a peace bonus scheme has been formulated

to compensate them. The Union Home Ministry has been reimbursing the security-related expenditure incurred by Assam, Tripura, Manipur and Nagaland, he said.

The Planning Commission formulated the scheme at the behest of the Union Home Ministry, said Advani adding that security and development are the two basic issues for all-round development in the region.

Addressing the gathering, Planning Commission deputy chairman K C Pant said information technology centres will come up in all the blocks of the North-eastern States.

Pant, who arrived here yesterday, held meetings with Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar, his Council

of Ministers and senior officials on the State Government's Ninth Plan performance so far, difficulties in various sectors and planning and development in the State.

He said there was a scope to use the Chittagong port, which is 35-km from the South Tripura's border town Sabroom, to boost the region's economic development. The Assam-Agartala National Highway (NH44) is being expanded upto Sabroom. Pant said the railway line was expanded to connect the capital and a survey work on the Agartala-Sabroom route (135 km) was also on. Natural gas, found in Tripura, could be used for major power and fertiliser plants and the power could be sold for commercial purposes. (UNI)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 MAR 2000

BODO TRUCE

Wrong to talk to only one group

THE decision to suspend operations against Bodo Liberation Tigers could have come earlier had the Centre responded to their peace feelers. The ban in October 1997 was baffling particularly when the outfit showed willingness to negotiate. What signalled the change in thinking is the absence of attacks on security forces and the militants' vow not to indulge in unlawful activities, an example worth emulating by other militant organisations. Defence Minister George Fernandes gave it little prominence during one of his visits and reportedly contacted leaders of the rival group — National Democratic Front of Bodoland. Floated four years ago by Premising Brahma, the BLT is the original Volunteer Force headed by him and was the armed wing of the All Bodo Students Union and Bodo People's Action Committee which spearheaded the movement before signing the February 1993 accord. Whether or not the BLT, which is demanding a separate state, will live up to its promise depends on the Centre's next move. But difficulties are bound to arise if Delhi singles it out for talks. If the strategy is to initiate dialogue individually Delhi will be repeating the same mistake it made in Nagaland involving only the Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland. Any attempt to marginalise agitation leaders will only complicate matters.

The NDFB (formerly Bodo Security Force) is still active and the fratricidal feud continues. There is no unity among Bodo leaders. The People's Democratic Front, an ally of the ruling AGP, is split with one group joining the Absu and BPAC and the other running the interim BAC. Bodo leaders' inconsistency is responsible for delay in reaching a solution. If they had accepted the suggestion two years ago for a joint working group, perhaps some beginning could have been made. Given the Centre's stand that there will be no further division of Assam, the Bodos have no alternative but to accept the accord with necessary modifications. They should also not object to sitting with non-Bodo organisations as plains tribals constitute only 38 per cent of the population in the region.

THE STATESMAN

28 MAR 2000

A question of language

their languages.

The Asom Sahitya Sabha has since taken the initiative to promote tribal languages and literature, and last year its incumbent president, Chandra Prasad Saikia, announced plans to prepare a multilingual dictionary of Assamese and the tribal languages. A move is also afoot to translate the best of tribal literature into Assamese and vice-versa.

In the interest of national integration, the Union government wanted to nip this trend in the bud. At the height of the Bodos' Roman script movement, the Centre took the initiative to sign an accord with the Bodos and the Assam government to adopt the Devanagari script in return for hefty financial assistance for the development of the Bodo language and literature. But that did not hold any water until the Bodos themselves did a turnaround.

Immediately after the Mainao Nwgwr conclave of the BSS in the last week of February, Sabha president Brahma said: "The controversy over the issue has been unanimously resolved." He said the Devanagari script was more scientific and it best suited the Bodo language phonetically. When it was pointed out that the Roman script belonged to the age of information technology, he was optimistic that the necessary software would soon be developed to make Devanagari suitable for information technology.

Over the past 25 years, a lot has been done with the make-do Devanagari script for the development of the Bodo language and literature in terms of preparation of dictionaries and grammar and Absu and the BSS feel that if they switch over to the Roman script now, the community will regress by 25 years. Something it can ill afford.

(The author is a freelance writer.)

followed the Bodos and announced their willingness to adopt the Roman script for their respective languages so as to steer clear of Assamese. The Rabhas, the Tiwas and the Mishings all wanted the Roman script because they thought it would help them develop their language and literature. The Roman script is more useful than Assamese for the Tiwa language, both grammatically and phonetically, says Tiwa Sahitya Sabha president T Bordo-loi. In 1997, the Tiwa Sahitya Sabha, the Mishing Sahitya Sabha and the Rabha Sahitya Sabha all passed resolutions to accept the Roman script.

According to Moniram Muchari, former president of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, the Roman script would familiarise the Bodos with English, which is very essential for the community to develop their language and literature. According to eminent socialist Amalendu Guha, it is due to the lackadaisical attitude of the Asom Sahitya Sabha towards development of tribal languages and literature that such a question has cropped up. Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya use the Roman script for

Torn between the Roman and the Devanagari scripts, the Bodos have become restive again because of the awakening of a linguistic and socio-cultural movement and a political renaissance, writes BIJOY SANKAR SAIKIA



THE Bodos qualify as an ancient-modern tribe of Assam, the earliest known inhabitants of the valley. Belonging to the Tibeto-Burmese linguistic group and of Indo-Mongoloid stock, they are said to have migrated to the Brahmaputra Valley from their original homesteads in Tibet, China, Mongolia and Siberia some time around 5,000 BC.

By and large a homogeneous plains people, they are mainly concentrated in the north bank and in specific pockets of some other parts of the Brahmaputra Valley. But small Bodo populations can also be found in West Bengal, Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Bangladesh. As per 1991 estimates, their total population in North-east India is around seven million.

Since the 1960s, the Bodos have been restive because of the awakening of a linguistic and socio-cultural movement and a political renaissance. They have been seeking recognition for their language and culture, demanding special politico-economic status like an autonomous council and are struggling for a separate sovereign state. During 1974-75, they had also launched a vigorous mass movement for the adoption of the Roman script for the Bodo language. As many as 20 Bodos sacrificed their lives for the cause. The issue was hanging fire till the other day when the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, an apex literary body, decided to revert and adopt Devanagari as the Bodo language script.

In so doing, the Sabha defied strong opposition from a hardcore school which favoured the Roman script as well as the diktat of the militant National Democratic Front of Bodoland. The NDFB publicity secretary, B Erakdao, had alleged that the move to adopt Devanagari was influenced by the RSS and the BJP's

"Hindu Hindustan, one culture, one religion" mantra so as to Aryamise the tribals, and warned the Sabha office-bearers against any attempt at demeaning the sacrifice of Bodos for the cause. The outfit had openly campaigned for the Roman script at a recent BSS conference by distributing leaflets, but the Sabha president, Bineswar Brahma, said a militant outfit "cannot dictate terms to us".

The BSS had earlier organised mass opinion for the inclusion of the Bodo language as a medium of instruction in Bodo-dominated areas, that it be recognised as a medium of instruction in Gauhati University, Dibrugarh University and the North Eastern Hills University and that a post-graduate course in the language be started in GU. Moreover, the initiative of the BSS forced the Assam government to accord the Bodo language associate officialdom in the state in 1985. Interestingly enough, adoption of the Roman script was till recently one of the main demands of the All Bodo Students Union which is now spearheading the statehood movement. But during their recent annu-

1963-68, they raised a demand to have Bodo as a language of instruction, and in 1974-75 decided to banish the Assamese script they'd been using all along and demand the Roman script.

Absu does not recognise Assamese, saying a concrete Assamese language did not exist in the past and what there was had been derived from Sanskrit, Oriya, Bengali, Parsi and Bodo languages, and it assumed script form only in the 13th century.

Interestingly, several ethnic tribes

Main Naga groups may be invited for talks: Advani

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, March 28. — The Centre is considering a proposal to involve major Naga underground groups in peace talks, Mr L K Advani said here today.

The Union home minister said negotiations with the National Socialist Council of Nagalim had suffered a temporary setback after the arrest of the outfit's chief, Th. Muivah, in Thailand. NSCN leaders are reluctant to participate in the talks in Muivah's absence.

Before leaving for New Delhi, Mr Advani told reporters that the Governor and the chief minister of Nagaland had proposed that main Naga insurgent groups be involved in the peace process. The Centre is now considering the proposal, he said.

(Mr S C Jamir, Nagaland chief minister, said in Kohima yesterday that the Centre had decided to involve the state government in the the peace negotiation with the Naga undergrounds.)

Asked whether the National Liberation Front of Tripura, operating in collusion with the NSCN, would be drawn into the peace process, Mr Advani said the ceasefire agreement with the NSCN pertained to Nagaland only.

"The Tripura government should try to persuade state's rebel units to come to the negotiation table and find out a solution to their problems within framework of India's Constitution," he said.

Mr Advani said the issue of dismantling of rebel camps in Bangladesh had already been taken up at the appropriate level in Dhaka.

"The director-general of the

Border Security Force has been told to remain in close touch with his Bangladesh counterpart to check trans-border movement of armed rebel groups."

The Union home minister, who reviewed the Tripura situation with top security officials, said: "We had a comprehensive and candid discussion on matters of security."



Advani: thrust on Punjab experience

State's chief secretary, director-general of police, top officials of the Union home ministry and representatives of the Assam Rifles, BSF, CRPF, Tripura State Rifles and other central forces were present.

"It was felt at the meeting that the intelligence collection must be stepped up and a better coordination should be ensured between the police and the central paramilitary forces to combat insurgency in Tripura," Mr Advani said.

Talking about the insurgency problem of Tripura, he said a sense of security should be instilled in the minds of the people. People should feel a sense of partnership and participation.

The Punjab experience had shown that the state police should provide the cutting edge to the counter-insurgency operation. The Army and paramilitary forces will assist the police. "The strategy paid dividends and now the situation in Punjab is absolutely normal," Mr Advani said.

He said the Centre and the state government were working in tandem to fight insurgency. "The Inter-Services Intelligence is quite active in the North-east. I should not spell out any more information in this regard."

Mr Advani said the Centre had given 181 vehicles, 314 communication sets, 250 bullet-proof jackets, besides self-loading rifles, light machine guns and other modern weapons for modernisation of the Tripura police in last three years. Security-related expenditures being incurred by the north-eastern states were being provided by the Centre, Mr Advani said.

Mr Advani held discussions with Mr Manik Sarkar and the senior members of his Cabinet. **N-E strategy on militancy:** North-eastern states and Sikkim will soon adopt a common strategy to combat militancy and form a forum for tackling matters of common interest, PTI adds from Shillong.

A meeting in this regard will be held on 29 April, to be attended by chief ministers, official sources said here today.

The Meghalaya chief minister, Mr E K Mawlong, and Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta will visit border areas of block one and two on 28 April to solve the long-standing border problem between the two states.

Bid to involve Khaplang

Advani backs Jamir idea on peace talks

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Agartala, March 28: Corroborating Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir's statement in Kohima yesterday, Union home minister L.K. Advani today said the Centre was contemplating inviting the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) to participate in the peace talks.

"The Centre is considering S.C. Jamir and (Nagaland Governor) O.P. Sharma's proposal to invite the NSCN(K) to participate in the peace talks. The outfit's involvement in the peace process will be good for Nagaland," Advani told a press conference at the state secretariat here.

Advani said the proposal was made when Jamir and Sharma met him and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in New Delhi over the weekend.

Jamir announced in Kohima yesterday that the Centre had invited the Nagaland government — hitherto detached from the peace talks — to be party to its dialogue with the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah).

The chief minister also said the Centre was likely to formally invite the Khaplang faction to participate in the peace talks. "The outfit has already expressed its willingness to come to the negotiating table. An invitation from the Centre will expedite the process," he said.

Admitting that the Centre's dialogue with the NSCN(I-M) had not made much progress, Advani said today that Thuingaleng Muivah's arrest in Thailand had delayed the process further.

"Muivah's arrest in Bangkok has stalled the whole process. Other NSCN(I-M) leaders are unwilling to continue the peace talks in his absence," he said.

On the situation in Tripura, Advani said the onus was on the Manik Sarkar government to bring about an improvement in

the situation. "When the armed forces take on militant outfits, the cutting edge is provided by the police," he said.

Stating that the Centre was helping the Tripura government "at every step", Advani said two additional paramilitary battalions would be sent to the state soon.

"In the past two years, the Centre has provided 181 vehicles, 314 wireless communication sets, 250 bulletproof jackets and sophisticated arms and ammunition. Funds for modernisation of the police force have also been sanctioned. Recently, a proposal to raise three more India reserve battalions was cleared," the home minister said.

Advani said the Centre was against indiscriminate enforcement of the National Security Act, but supported its use as a deterrent against anti-national activities in extraordinary situations like the one in Tripura.

The home minister held a series of meetings with Cabinet ministers and senior bureaucrats before leaving for New Delhi. He also called on expelled CPM leader and former chief minister Nripen Chakraborty at the latter's residence. Official sources termed it a "courtesy call".

Opp. demand rejected

The Union home minister today turned down the Opposition's demand for imposition of President's rule in Tripura, saying, "It is not feasible at the moment."

Advani advised a Congress delegation led by PCC chief Birajit Sinha to convince the party high command to raise the issue in Parliament. Sinha and leader of the Opposition told newsmen here today that the home minister wanted a consensus on the issue. "He told us that the Centre could take such a step only if the Congress high command raised the issue in Parliament," Sinha said.

THE TELEGRAPH

29 MAR 2000

Cong, Laloo strike jumbo Cabinet deal

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 23. — The Congress has persuaded Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav to form a jumbo Cabinet in Bihar, to accommodate most of the Congress MLAs in it.

After two rounds of discussions between the RJD chief and the Congress' five-member team, it was agreed that the MLAs who have been elected to the Assembly more than twice will be given Cabinet berths, while those having more than one-term experience will be made ministers of state. The new-comers are expected to be given berth later, or may be rewarded with positions in various state corporations.

The Congress has also managed to convince Mr Yadav to give it three important portfolios — agriculture, finance and power — to create an impression that the coalition would provide a government "that works".

The party's initial demand of putting the key ministries under the charge of technocrats has not been accepted, "as the ministers have to be members of the either House of the Assembly". It, however, has persuaded the RJD chief to appoint three technocrats as advisers in these ministries.

The Congress spokesman, Mr Ajit Jogi, said a coordination committee would be formed "to ensure an efficient government". Besides the Congress, other parties that have agreed to join the government are the Krantikari Communist Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and the JMM-Majhi. A few Independents will also join the government.

Mr Jogi said talks were held with Mr Yadav to work out the details of the common

CONG:

(Continued from page 1)

minimum programme that the two parties had agreed upon a fortnight ago. "Most of the common minimum programme are of general nature. We will now lay down a time frame to implement the pro-poor policies." Though the Congress said allotment of portfolios is the "the chief minister's prerogative", it gave enough hints that it had negotiated a jumbo-Cabinet.

"The experience in Goa, where we insisted on keeping the number of ministers less than 15 per cent of the Assembly's strength, was not encouraging," a senior party leader said.

■ See CONG: page 6

THE STATESMAN

24 MAR 2000

THE lion is back in the jungle; the small creatures are at bay again," roared Laloo Prasad Yadav after his wife and chief minister Rabri Devi recently won the motion of confidence in the Bihar assembly. The remark was obviously aimed at running down the Opposition NDA campaigners who cried hoarse against the Laloo-Rabri regime sponsored "jungle raaj" during their campaigns in the run-up to the assembly polls.

Victory this time around has been sweeter, for the wily "Raja of Bihar" single-handedly foiled the combined efforts of the likes of AB Vajpayee, LK Advani and, of course, Nitish Kumar and George Fernandes aided by Bollywood stars Hema Malini and Shatrughan Sinha.

What's more demoralising for the NDA is that Nitish Kumar failed to hold on to the chief ministership despite a "favourable" governor allowing him to first form a government. Seven days into his herculean efforts as chief minister, he failed to garner the required MLA support which paved the way for the fall of his government and the subsequent return of Rabri Devi.

However, Laloo Yadav may have won the political battle but not the war. His wife's return to power virtually coincides with the CBI's decision to chargesheet her and her husband in the disproportionate assets case. Will Mr Yadav be able to retain his wife as chief minister thereafter?

It will be well nigh impossible for the docile housewife turned chief executive of the state to retain her post if the court takes cognizance against her. Even her "mighty" husband had to resign in 1997 after the Supreme Court rejected his bail petition in a case connected with the fodder scam and the CBI special court issued a warrant against him.

But then Laloo Yadav had the option of "installing" his better half on the "gaddi" of Bihar. Needless to say, the embattled RJD supremo will find it difficult finding a person as "trustworthy" as his wife should the situation force him to replace her. The developments are, of course, irksome for him because, despite his victory in the political battle, he is an anxious man today. That's why he didn't celebrate Holi the way he used to do earlier.

An anxious looking Laloo Yadav told me on Holi: "Look! These NDA leaders are a bunch of crooks and conspirators. They failed to defeat me in the political battle which proved beyond all their calcu-

A battle won, but not the war

The Laloo-Rabri regime may have staged a comeback in Bihar, but its opponents await CBI action for reprieve, writes NALIN VERMA

lations that I command the love of the masses. They first used the governor to plunder the mandate. They're now using the CBI to destabilise the government which has got the mandate from the masses to rule Bihar."

He fretted and fumed: "Look at these politically impotent NDA leaders. Aware that they would not be able to defeat me politically they implicated me in false cases of the fodder scam. The RJD legislators elected Rabri Devi as their chief minister when I was forced to go to jail. All these leaders cried hoarse that I have imposed my wife on Bihar. Now the people through their mandate have sanctioned Rabri Devi to rule Bihar. But the governor has sanctioned the CBI to prosecute me in the case in which the investigating agency has also made Rabri Devi a co-accused.

"Rabri Devi initially did not figure in the case," he said, "but the CBI has implicated her in the DA case (5A/98) to serve the political purpose of the NDA government at the Centre, it's as simple as that. I bet you the CBI would not have implicated Rabri Devi had she not become chief minister in 1997. The CBI is just supporting the NDA's gameplan to remove Rabri Devi by undemocratic means."

It's for the court to eventually decide whether the CBI has falsely implicated Bihar's first couple, but the fact remains that the investigating agency has found sufficient evidence to accuse the wife of aiding and abetting the illegal earnings of her husband. The developments are a godsend for the demoralised NDA leaders. An opportunity for them to manipulate things in their favour.

Having virtually surrendered after the grave setback against Laloo Yadav at the hustings and the subsequent fall of the Nitish Kumar government, they now eagerly await the CBI chargesheet. "We will not allow Rabri Devi to stay in



office once the CBI chargesheet her and the court takes cognizance against her," said leader of the Opposition Sushil Kumar Modi.

Now to the most important question: how did the party led by Laloo Yadav — condemned by the CBI for

his "involvement in corruption" and described by the Prime Minister and union home minister as the "epitome of anarchy" — outdo the NDA in the battle of the ballot? Why did the people give him the bigger mandate, despite the country's premier investigating agency finding him guilty of conspiring to loot Rs 1,000 crore from the state exchequer?

The RJD has won 123 seats and alone is ahead in comparison to the NDA constituents comprising the BJP, the Samata Party and the Janata Dal (U), who together have 122 seats. The RJD-CPI-M combine has 125 seats. The NDA leaders are more puzzled at their poor performance. They had won 41 of the 54 Lok Sabha seats, virtually routing the RJD in the Lok Sabha elections only five months ahead of the assembly elections in Bihar, and were expecting a minimum 175-180 seats.

But the reasons are not hard to find. Though the NDA bagged 41 seats in the 1999 Lok Sabha polls, it secured only four per cent more of the vote than the RJD — 41 per cent against the RJD's 37 per cent in the 1999 polls. This means the NDA nominees won the maximum number of seats because the group of four parties (the BJP, Samata Party, JD-U and the BPP) succeeded in fighting unitedly and ensuring a one-to-one contest against the RJD. This stopped the anti-Laloo votes from being split, thereby ensuring more seats for the NDA.

Soon after their victory, the over-ambitious NDA leaders, including Nitish Kumar, RV Paswan and Sushil Modi, busied themselves over the chief

minister's chair, sanguine about removing Rabri Devi from power at the end of the assembly polls. They virtually ignored the fact that the RJD was still a strong political force, having secured 37 per cent of the vote.

The protracted infighting among the NDA leaders resulted in BJP, Samata Party, Janata Dal(U) and BPP nominees being locked in a "friendly fight" over 60 seats. This helped the RJD more than anything else.

Besides, the NDA which fought the poll on the plank of

opposing the Laloo-Rabri regime's "jungle raaj" did nothing to show it would replace this with "Ram raaj". It even outdid the RJD in fielding underworld operators, including Ranvir Sena men who were directly involved in the massacre of Dalits in central Bihar. And last but not least, Laloo Yadav succeeded in convincing his constituents — mainly the Yadavs, Muslims and a big section of the Dalits — that the NDA was getting him "victimized" by the CBI because he represented the backward and Dalit forces.

(The author is the Patna-based correspondent of The Statesman.)

RABRI ACCOMMODATES 82 IN JUMBO CABINET

All Cong. MLAs made Ministers in Bihar

526/3
101

By K. Balchand

PATNA, MARCH 25. The Bihar Chief Minister, Mrs. Rabri Devi, today expanded her Cabinet into a two-tier Ministry comprising altogether 82 Ministers including 20 Congress MLAs — the largest Ministry ever formed in the State.

The Chief Minister inducted 80 Ministers today, of whom 39 are of Cabinet rank and 41 are Ministers of State. While three failed to turn up, one Minister was inducted earlier.

The Governor, Mr. V.C. Pande, who administered the oath, had struck out the name of Mr. Jitan Ram Manjhi from the list submitted to him by the Chief Minister on the ground that he happened to be an absconder wanted by police in some criminal cases.

The two-week-old RJD Government's transformation into a coalition regime witnessed the entry of 20 Congress(I) MLAs into the Ministry, apart from the induction of both the KSP members and seven Independents who have extended support to the Government. Thus, as many as 51 RJD MLAs have been given a berth in the jumbo-sized Council of Ministers. Including the Chief Minister and the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Ramachandra Purve, (inducted earlier), the RJD's share stands at 53.

The Chief Minister had sought to give representation to all the 22 Congress(I) MLAs. But two of them did not turn up. Mr. Pradeep Kumar Balmuchi was reportedly upset at not being given a Cabinet-rank berth, while the absence of Mr. Abdul Jalil Mastan was attributed to bereavement in his family.

Prominent among those inducted include the RJD national spokesman, Mr. Shivanand Tiwari, Mr. Shakuni Chaudhary (RJD), and from the Congress(I), the CLP leader, Mr. Bhurkan Ansari and Mr. Bagun

Sumbrai. Those who once again return as Cabinet Ministers are Mr. Rammai Ram, Mr. Jagdanand Singh, Mr. Ghulam Sarwar and Mr. Shanker Prasad Tekriwal. Interestingly, Mr. Deo Narain Yadav, Speaker in the previous Assembly, has not been accommodated after losing his office to the Congress (I) nominee, Mr. Sadanand Singh.

Ten of the Congress(I) MLAs have been given Cabinet rank, while the other 12 have been accommodated as Ministers of State. The non-inclusion of any of the Congress(I) legislators belonging to the Legislative Council has created some resentment among them, who apart from lodging their protest with the AICC(I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, boycotted the swearing-in ceremony.

Laloo reiterates offer

None of the five BSP MLAs, who support the Government, has been taken in. The RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, maintained that his offer to like-minded parties to join the coalition was still open, and added that the BSP president, Mr. Kanshi Ram, would take a final decision about his party's participation in the Government when he visits the State capital on March 27-28.

Mr. Yadav said he would sacrifice his own Ministers to accommodate members of other parties. The RJD president hinted at the possibility of dropping some RJD Ministers should the BSP agree to join the coalition. Senior RJD leaders, such as Mr. Mahabir Prasad, who had been a Minister for 10 continuous years in previous Cabinets of both Mr. Yadav and Mrs. Rabri Devi, and Mr. Surya Deo Rai, Mr. Muneswar Yadav, and Mr. Ram Chandra Rai, were among the notables not to find a place in the new dispensation.

THE HINDU
26 MAR 2000

CABINET MAKERS

No prospect for governance in Bihar

IN Bihar it is again the season for jumbo Cabinets — the irreducible fail-out of coalition politics. The Sarkaria commission recommended that the council of ministers should not exceed 10 per cent of the strength of the assembly or Parliament. This is followed more in the breach than the observance. There is a logic to the recommendation, however. The government spends a large amount of money on the upkeep of ministers — an unconscionable burden on the public exchequer. Small ministries mean valuable resources saved. In Bihar, which has been on the brink of complete pauperisation for a long time, any saving of public money is greatly to be desired. That is the solid argument against huge unwieldy ministerial teams. There is another one, in context. Congress wants pretty much all its MLAs in the ministry. A novel formula is adopted. MLAs with two terms behind them are to get full Cabinet status; those with one term get to be ministers of state. Newcomers to the assembly will be inducted into the ministry, later. The farcical has been the staple of Indian politics for a long time. But this formula defies comprehension. By elementary logic, selection of ministers and the allocation of portfolios are based on political considerations based on factors like factional balance (in a single-party majority scenario) and balance between parties (in a coalition scenario) and, ideally, judgements about competence and temperament.

But Bihar is, of course, the basket case, *par excellence*. And no one should be surprised that such bizarre arrangements can be arrived at when Laloo Prasad Yadav is involved in negotiations. It is futile to expect that he will help create a stable situation. The Congress has the whip hand and can be expected to exploit the situation to the hilt. It has already got its hands on prized ministries. It could have been said that governance will suffer because the RJD is hostage to the Congress were it not for the fact that the RJD and governance are not on speaking terms in any case. With the prospect of Rabri Devi and Laloo being chargesheeted in fresh cases gaining ground, governance is clearly not a commodity that is in anywhere near abundance. We can expect that Bihar will continue to remain in the grip of a vicious spiral of poverty, underdevelopment and social violence. And that the shameless loot of the taxpayer's money will continue.

THE STATESMAN

27 MAR 2000

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 29: To find lasting peace in Assam, both the Centre and the Bodo Liberation Tiger have agreed on a set of "ground rules" to end hostilities.

Union home minister L.K. Advani had earlier announced during the budget session of Parliament that the Centre and the BLT had declared a truce and were prepared to resolve the vexed Bodo problem "peacefully" through negotiations.

The ground rules were chalked out following an exhaustive two-day tripartite meeting between representatives of the home ministry, the Assam government and the BLT which ended today. Earlier, both the security forces and the

insurgents suspended operations against each other from March 15.

In the March 28-29 meeting, the home ministry was represented by additional secretary P.D. Shenoy, BLT by its vice-president Chimang Brahma, alias Chandan, alias Kamal Muchahary.

For starters, operations will remain suspended for a period of six months and it may be extended with "mutual agreement" subsequently. According to a home ministry statement issued after

Ground rules for Bodo ceasefire

the conclusion of the meeting, the ground rules "mutually" agreed on are:

■ The BLT will (a) completely abjure the path of violence; (b) not engage in violent or unlawful activities like killings, abductions, extortions, intimidation, carrying of arms in public and causing injuries; and (c) agree to abide by the Constitution and the laws of the land.

■ The security forces, including the Army, paramilitary personnel

and the state police, will not launch any operations against the outfit.

■ A joint monitoring group, on the lines of the ceasefire monitoring group operating in Nagaland, comprising representatives of the Centre, the state government and the BLT will oversee that all operations are suspended and no violation of the ground rules takes place within the designated areas.

Home ministry joint secretary in charge of the Northeast will be the chairman-cum-convenor of the joint monitoring group.

There will also be two other officials from the home ministry, one each from the Army and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), two state government officials and an equal number from the BLT.

Magic colours of home

Spring is the universal harbinger of glad tidings, and in Assam it weaves its enchantment quite literally. Women in rural areas are now busy spinning traditional motifs on gamosas and preparing delicacies for the occasion, humming "So dear is the bob-btn/ So dear is the shuttle, / Dearer still is the Bihu of Bohag, / What else to do but observe it?" The colours of Holi sift effortlessly into the festivities of Bohag Bihu, initially associated with the vernal equinox but basically a time for post-harvest relaxation and merrymaking.

The spirit of rejoicing is manifest in a myriad ways, not least in the state government's previous offers of safe passage to militants to unite with their families during this festive season.

This year, however, an atmosphere of resentment prevails. The administration, seething with a sense of betrayal following the recent killing of the Assam public works department minister, Nagen Sarma, is likely to overrule all suggestions of benevolence towards United Liberation Front of Asom cadre. In lower Assam, too, the atmosphere is far from tranquil, with the Bodos resurrecting their demand for a separate homeland.

With attention rivetted on the spate of ambushes by ULFA, the resurgence of the "Bodoland" movement over the past few weeks caught the authorities unawares. On March 2, in an unprecedented move, the People's Democratic Front and the All-Bodo Students Union-Bodo People's Action Committee combine addressed a joint rally calling for a separate state.

On the *ides* of March, the Union home minister, L.K. Advani, informed the Rajya Sabha that the government had suspended operations against the Bodo Liberation Tigers, the militant outfit spearheading the statehood agitation, to "create an environment conducive to talks between the militants and the government for finding a solution to the Bodo problem."

The call for cessation of hostilities underlines fresh parameters for talks: the BLT will inform the Assam police about the whereabouts of its activists to avoid confrontation. Secondly, a ceasefire monitoring council would be set up (as in the case of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim, Isak Muivah faction in Nagaland), comprising representatives from the BLT, the Assam government and sundry security agencies.

The BLT had announced unilateral suspension of armed operations in July 1999. Three months later, the government, in a "goodwill gesture", lifted the ban on the outfit for nine months. This is precisely why hectic parleys are underway to garner public opinion on the Bodoland issue before the ban expires in July this year.

The Union home ministry statement clarified that the BLT would "completely abjure the path of violence and abide by the Constitution and the laws of the land." And while the BLT, possibly the most demure of the Bodo outfits, has welcomed the government's gesture, the other armed militant group, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland which is banned, has warned the Tigers against becoming "easy prey" of the "evil designs" of the Centre.

It would, indeed, be a gross miscalculation to consider holding negotiations with just a segment of separatists. Just as the Union government has invited the Nagaland government and is considering the inclusion of the Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland in

The demand for a Bodo homeland may be resolved if the Assam government and pro-Bodoland leaders can discuss it in good faith, writes **Sudipta Bhattacharjee**

the peace talks, it should include the NDFB in the ambit of the ceasefire and call all the Bodo parties and outfits to the negotiating table.

The ceasefire offer, however, simultaneously precludes talks on statehood. Instead, the government will grant effective autonomy to the Bodoland Autonomous Council.

The council was created after the signing of the Bodoland accord on February 20, 1993. But the All-Bodo Students Union, one of the signatories, soon lost faith in the council's effectiveness and renewed its call for a separate state.

However, in a significant development, the ABSU, along with the BPAC and the PDF, floated the Bodoland Parliamentary Party on March 19 to unitedly fight for a separate homeland for the Bodos to be carved out of Assam. This fledgling party is headed by the Kokrajhar member of parliament, S.K. Bwiswmutiary, with the ABSU president, U.G. Brahma, as its secretary. The BPP will lay siege at the state secretariat at Dispur on April 5 to uphold the demand for a separate state.

It is also demanding more powers for the autonomous councils on the south bank of the Brahmaputra and the inclusion of Bodo Kacharis in the list of scheduled tribes. Despite the Centre having

ruled out further dissection of Assam, the Bodo party is in no mood to have these demands eclipsed by the usual platitude of "other pressing matters" with which the issue has been kept at bay thus far.

The Bodo demand for a separate state for plains tribals in the Brahmaputra valley aims at fulfilling their socio-economic status and the political ambitions of their leaders, since geographically it is far from viable.

Micro-level studies have revealed that Boro-speaking tribals are not in a majority in the north bank districts. For instance, as per the 1991 census, in Kokrajhar they comprise 28.5 per cent of the population, in Darrang 16.8 per cent, in Nalbari 12.4, Bongaigaon 12 per cent, Sonitpur 9.4 per cent, Barpeta 9.3 and in Kamrup (north) district only 5.1 per cent. But while the census said only 1.1 million Bodos live on the north bank, the tribal leaders aver; the figure is 2.7 million.

According to historical records, the Bodos reached Assam through two major migrations. Sidney

- Endle, in his book, *The Kacharis*, written in 1911, states that one stream of these tribals came from the foothills of the Himalayas into western Assam (what are today Kokrajhar and Nalbari districts) from the northern side. They called themselves "Boro", though the As-

samese referred to them as "Kacharis".

The other migrant branch came from the east (then known as the Chutia kingdom) to settle in the Brahmaputra valley. But there is no disputing the fact that they were the earliest indigenous settlers there: the names of all rivers in the area begin with the Kachari "di" (meaning water) — the Dibong, Dikhu, Dihang, Digaru, Dibru, Disang, Dimu and Dikrang among them.

Over the years, the heterogeneous social fabric, resulting from an inevitable intermingling of tribes and non-tribes, has been ripped apart by ethnic violence. The escalating tensions and death toll compelled the authorities to take recourse to stopgap sops like the accord and the Bodoland Autonomous Council and promises of largesse.

After the formation of the BAC in 1993, the mixed population wrangled over demarcation of borders. Following prolonged negotiations, the dispute over 515 villages in the council area (between the Sankosh river in the west and the Mazbat-Pasnoi to the east) was sorted out but not before the fuse of agitation had ignited the valley once again. But while non-tribals have mostly been the victims of ethnic cleansing drives, the non-Bodo tribes have also begun to distance themselves from the major tribe.

The accord, which had also been signed in springtime, had envisaged "social, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement" of the Bodos.

These can all be achieved within the framework of the BAC. Why, then, is there a renewed clamour for statehood in spring seven years later?

One theory is that complex economic issues have overridden administrative, political and constitutional compulsions. This has egged on the leaders, so far unable to "fulfil" the aspirations of the people, into tapping popular sentiment by resurrecting the spectre of a statehood stir once more.

The other theory is that of deprivation (of land, jobs and development) by encroachers. Assam's multiple vivisection has been the result of "emotional" upheavals among the tribal groups following the imposition of the Official Languages Act, 1960 and the introduction of Assamese as the medium of instruction. It gave birth to what is now referred to as the "script movement" of the Bodos and even led to the formation of the hill states of Meghalaya and Mizoram.

Successive state governments in Assam have tried to take the steam out of the Bodo movement by engineering rifts between the hardliners and moderates. Since these policies have not yielded any positive result, it is time to thrash out the issue once and for all.

The BLT has appealed to all sections of the people to help find a "lasting political solution". But the *modus vivendi* hardly provides cause for cheer. There are any number of detractors and vested interests likely to dissemble and derail the ongoing peace initiatives if the Bodo leaders are not united or alert to these machinations.

The Centre has done well to invite the leaders for talks; it could do better by making its gesture an all-encompassing one. It is now upto the state government and the leaders of the new party to reach an amicable and viable solution to make this Bihu (or *Bhatheli*, Bodo-style) a harmonious one in the valley.

State governments in Assam have tried to take the steam out of the Bodo movement by trying to divide the hardliners and the moderates

THE TELEGRAPH
30 MAR 2000

MARXISTS ON A LIMB

Advani makes a point in Tripura

HOPES that the invocation of the Disturbed Areas Act in Tripura in February 1997 would help the Left government combat tribal insurgency have been belied. Initially a temporary measure, it has come to stay, in the process losing much of its bite. Three years down the line, the law and order situation is bad, with LK Advani admitting as much. The on-the-spot assessment he made should help the Centre decide whether or not it should restore the level of troops deployed before the Kargil conflict. It passes understanding why, despite its own task forces, the Left government has not been able to make progress. Apart from central assistance to modernise the police force, the state has raised two armed police battalions. The demand for more troops is an admission of the inefficiency of local law enforcement agencies. The Centre's reluctance to use the army is understandable. Political interference has often undermined its achievements and affected morale. This happened in Assam and also in Manipur.

Tripura cries out for attention. The Left government has proved incapable of doing anything single-handed. It calls for combined operations by the Centre and the state to restore a semblance of peace before the Tripura Hill Areas District Council elections. A large number of non-tribal settlers have left following threats by tribal militant outfits. The emergence of non-tribal militant groups to challenge ethnic cleansing by tribals is an ominous sign which the Centre cannot ignore. The danger of an ethnic war looms large. Advani's reference to the Punjab experience that the state police should provide the cutting edge to counter-insurgency operations is significant. If this can work in volatile Punjab, there is no reason why it should not work in Tripura. Outside help that tribal militants are getting bolsters the need for firm steps against them.

THE STATESMAN

3 1 MAR 2 000

Tight security for Bihar polls

By K. Balchand (D-1)

PATNA, FEB. 11. Amid tight security, the elections to elect a new Bihar Assembly begin tomorrow. The first phase of polling, covering 108 constituencies of south and central Bihar, assumes significance in the wake of naxalite violence as also because aspirants for the State's top job are in the fray.

While the dust has settled on the campaigning, the administration is bracing up for the real challenge of conducting a peaceful poll. The State Government has issued shoot-at-sight orders and deployed about 480 companies of para-military forces and the Bihar Military Police to maintain law and order.

Electioneering, more or less, passed off peacefully barring a few incidents where naxalites set ablaze some campaign vehicles for not heeding their call for the boycott of polls. These incidents occurred in south Bihar.

Police have stepped up vigil and sealed off the borders. Apart from conducting raids, the para-military forces have been conducting flag marches. Troops have been deployed at crucial points. In the State capital, the para-military forces have been assisted by members of the Rapid Action Force in manning important check-points.

The leaders aspiring for the Chief Minister's post are among the 1,297 candidates in the fray whose fate will be decided by an electorate of 2.02 crores.



Alleged booth-captors on Friday practise with their firearms in a village outside Patna on the eve of elections.— AP

While the Congress(I) is contesting all the 108 seats, the ruling Rashtriya Janata Dal has put up candidates in 95 constituencies leaving eight for its ally, the CPI (M). Its other allies, the BJP and the JD(S), have fielded three and one candidate respectively.

The picture in the NDA camp is not clear though. According to the arrangement reached on seat-sharing, the BJP is contesting 70, the Samata 23, the JD(U) 10 and the BPP five. However, the BJP has fielded 87 candidates, the Samata 43, the JD(U) 29 and the BPP 10.

Laboo still a factor: Page 13

Three fronts vying for power in Manipur

PTI-UNI report from Imphal: In Manipur, the fate of 206 candidates will be decided in the first phase of polling in 27 Assembly

constituencies of the State where three major fronts are vying for power.

As many as 26 sitting members including eight Ministers are in the fray. Besides the former Chief Minister, Mr. Rishang Keishing, the Transport Minister, Mr. Moring Makunga, the Health Minister, Mr. V. Hangkhalian, and the Forests Minister, Mr. Gangumei Kamei, will seek the verdict of 7,34,000 voters.

Official sources here said preparations were complete and most of the polling parties had reached their respective destinations. Elaborate security arrangements have been made in view of the poll boycott called by the NSCN (IM). Over 20,000 State police personnel and 34 battalions of para-military forces have been deployed for poll duty.

The campaign, which ended yesterday, was on a low key with most of the parties deciding against deputing their top brass for electioneering. The CPI general secretary, Mr. A. B. Bardhan, and the NCP leader, Mr. P. A. Sangma, were the exceptions.

Armed militants forcibly took away election materials from polling personnel of Henglep Assembly constituency in Churachandpur district.

Sources said that armed militants took away election materials of nine polling stations in the constituency last night. The Election Office is arranging to supply new polling materials.

BIHAR PROSPECTS

5.5 Cold comfort for ravaged state

THE first round of polling in Bihar is upon us. The result is not a foregone conclusion as it seemed after last year's parliamentary elections, when Laloo Prasad Yadav's party was comprehensively wiped out. The assembly elections then seemed a safe bet for the NDA. But the NDA is now seriously riven by dissension. NDA partners could not work out seat-sharing deals in time for the first round. So they fielded separate candidates in many of the 108 seats that go to the polls on 12 February. Since then each constituent has appealed to candidates to retire from seats with more than one alliance candidate. Some have, a great many have not. So the anti-Laloo vote will be split in south Bihar. Without a split the RJD would have been wiped out in south Bihar. Now Laloo can look forward to some pickings, however slim.

In the second and third round of polling central and north Bihar figure. For these, alliance partners did manage to work out deals in time. They are therefore better placed to breach Laloo Prasad's more formidable defences. But the bickering between allies will have two significant consequences. There will now be some doubt about the stability of a regime run by an alliance that finds it so difficult to sort out internal problems. This could lead to a small swing towards Laloo Prasad. Second, even though a seat-sharing deal is finally reached, bitterness remains. This will have trickled down to ground levels. There is a perception that the BJP and JD-U are now closer, and Samata is being marginalised, because Samata has a base in Bihar and can challenge the BJP's pretensions. The JD-U cannot, so it gets cosy with BJP for favours. That is precisely what happened at the seat-sharing talks. Samata workers will be disaffected. During campaigning and mobilising votes this could help Laloo. In the parliamentary elections the RJD polled 37 per cent of the votes and the NDA around 41 per cent. Small swings can be crucial. If NDA manages to unseat the RJD, despite attempts to self-destruct, it will have problems maintaining a stable regime, once it gets past the hurdle of picking a chief minister. Whatever happens in this elections, one thing is clear: the people of Bihar should not be unduly optimistic about the prospects of decent governance.

THE STATESMAN
12 FEB 2000

POLLING BOOTHS LOOTED, BALLOT PAPERS DESTROYED

Naxalites strike terror in Bihar, 17 killed

By K. Balchand

PATNA, FEB. 12. Seventeen persons, including 12 police personnel, were killed and 16 others injured today, when naxalites struck terror during the first phase of polling for the Bihar Assembly. A naxalite was also killed. (According to a PTI report, 21 persons were killed in the violence). Several polling booths were looted in Garhwa district. Clashes, rigging and snatching of ballot-papers were reported in Gaya District. In New Delhi, the Election Commission expressed concern at the continuing violence in Bihar.

Though polling in Bihar was initially affected by an overcast weather, the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. A. K. Basu, said it picked up later in the day.

On Friday night, naxalites blasted a vehicle carrying a polling party to Chainpur village under Kaimur district. The incident occurred at Karkat Ghati in which eight persons including five Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel, a presiding officer, a constable and a driver, were killed. A constable, injured in the incident was rushed to a hospital at Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh.

Mr. Basu said the polling party had been asked by the district administration to camp for the night at Chaudama village. But the party had violated the order and instead proceeded towards their destination during night time. In another incident, three BSF personnel were killed and two others injured when a naxalite group attacked a polling booth in Kudrum village under Ranka police station of Garhwa district. Several booths were looted, according to Mr. Basu. Police officials have rushed to the spot.

Another BSF jawan and a police official were killed and a polling official was injured in a landmine blast in Jharia village of Vishnugarh police station of Hazaribagh district. A polling official was killed in Manatu in a mine blast. Three BSF personnel and another



Paramilitary personnel, who were injured in a landmine blast set off by the PWG naxalites in Garhwa, Bihar, being shifted to hospital on Saturday. — AP

and the Rashtriya Janata Dal president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, cast their vote at the Veterinary College campus here.

Repoll in Manipur

By Our Correspondent

IMPHAL, FEB. 12. Incidents of snatching of ballot boxes and destroying of ballot papers, abduction of polling officials and clashes between rival parties were reported in Manipur, where 27 constituencies went to the poll in the first phase of Assembly elections. (A PTI report said militants killed six people in poll-related violence.)

The Chief Electoral Officer of Manipur, Mr. D. S. Poonia, said repolling might be ordered in at least 63 booths, mostly in Churachandpur district. Heavy rain was reported in the Naga-dominated districts of Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Senapati and Chandel, ignoring the poll boycott call given by the NSCN(IM)

official were injured in the blast. A Naxalite was also killed in the area, according to the Home Secretary, Mr. U. N. Panjia. Two poll parties were reportedly ambushed in Palamu district. The State Government pressed into service its helicopter to airlift two BSF jawans injured in the incident. They were admitted to the Patna Medical College Hospital.

The Home Secretary said more than 500 persons had been detained today. A clash was reported between two candidates at Atri in Gaya district. He said that the level of violence was lower than expected.

UNI reports:

The Bihar Governor, Mr. V. C. Pandey, could not exercise his franchise today. Official sources said, Mr. Pandey's name could not be included in the rolls as according to the Election Commission rule, the time for filing the form had elapsed, when Mr. Pandey took charge.

The Bihar Chief Minister, Mrs. Rabri Devi

DEATH POLLS

The violence that accompanied the first phase of Bihar's assembly elections has proven grimly true to the general sense of foreboding. About 21 persons have been killed and 50 injured. Only a little more than half the electorate across 108 constituencies have voted. Widespread irregularities — booth capturing, rigging, disruptive conflicts between parties — have always been part of Bihar's heavily criminalized electoral tradition. But the situation in the state has acquired another dimension since the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, with the increasingly violent enforcement of the poll boycott called by the extremist Naxalite groups, the Maoist Communist Centre and the People's War Group. The number of deaths has been steadily rising: 44 in the 1998 and 64 in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections. The only reason behind the fewer casualties this year is the heavy rain that prevented some of the Naxalites' landmines from going off. The terror caused by these groups, particularly in their strongholds in south and central Bihar, has succeeded in preventing more than 65 per cent of the people in these areas from coming out to vote.

Two aspects of the Naxalites' mode of operation this time are significant. First, their main targets seem to be the police, security personnel and poll workers. In spite of the police department's assurance of being "fully equipped and prepared" to ensure "free and fair polling" and the Election Commission's satisfaction with these preparations, the security arrangements remained inadequate. The Naxalites have, by now, become experts with landmines, trained by their comrades in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. Bihar's landmine detection squads came nowhere near to matching this expertise. Even after offering lucrative insurance and assured jobs, the state government found it difficult to rope in the terrified Home Guards for election duty. Second, the extremists seem to have extended their stronghold, striking beyond their usual terrain. In Rohtas, an entire patrol vehicle was blown up, killing eight people. Quite obviously, what ought to be a normal process within a functioning democracy has become, in Bihar, nothing less than a major armed battle, the management of which is beyond the capacity of its law and order enforcing institutions. The EC can only distance itself in despair from such a concerted failure of everything that democratic governance ought to stand for.

THE TELEGRAPH

14 FEB 2000

14/2 Lawless in Bihar XG-17

COME ELECTIONS and Bihar begins to resemble a huge police and paramilitary camp. And it has only got worse over the years. Once the poll exercise is over, the region which produced the world's first republic and gave it two of its principal religions, Buddhism and Jainism, returns to its brutal, lawless ways. No one hears any longer of 'shoot-at-sight' orders, or of the so-called state-wide deployment of paramilitary forces. Power grabbers are in place and devil take the hindmost. That's the numbing attitude. Everyone knows that lawlessness mainly hits ordinary folk, and chiefly benefits the corrupt political elite, regardless of party labels, and their accomplices in the bureaucracy. Ruling politicians are usually careful to share the spoils with fraternal elements in the opposition, and the carnival goes on. They know they won't be caught so long as the rule of law continues to be a casualty. Also, since the 'loot' is chiefly of government finances, there is woefully little left with which to cater to the needs of the ordinary people, or to develop the infrastructure. It is this that has led to absolute desperation among the people which is exploited by extremist political elements and assorted political goons. The plain truth is: if the state knows only lawlessness round the year, how can it be expected to embrace the law at election time?

Where should the recovery begin? Thousands of armed police deployed to ensure violence-free elections must, of course, do their job. But, as experience shows, in the end they would only have rounded up a few petty criminals, and more members of the pitilessly deprived rural community who might be nabbed for laying landmines for small-time localised organisations carrying big-time tags like Maoist Communist Centre! The truth is these are people in search of everyday dignity and development whom life has forced to court trouble. While they will be dealt with by the law which temporarily tries to surface at election time, it is unlikely that any of the fat cats will be caught. Thus, hardened criminals and dangerous gun-toting men on the 'wanted' list of the police would continue to hold press conferences as candidates while the police will have no clue on how to go about nabbing them! There is no authoritative list of the numbers of criminals in the fray, but it can be safely said that they constitute a frighteningly large percentage of the total number of candidates, and belong to all parties, either officially or as rebels and independents. A clean-up act must begin here, and then extend to genuine structural reforms that benefit the poor. In no other way can the sanctity of the election exercise be protected.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
14 FEB 2000

HO 1 Campaigning for second phase ends, Bihar repoll peaceful

NEW DELHI, FEB. 15. Campaigning ended today for the second phase of Assembly elections to 108 constituencies in Bihar, marred by violence in the first round on Saturday, and 70 Assembly seats in Orissa to be held on February 17. Simultaneously, campaigning also ended for by-elections to the Bellary parliamentary seat, vacated by the Congress(I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, the Kannauj Lok Sabha seat from where the son of the Samajwadi Party leader, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, Mr. Akhilesh Yadav, is in the fray, and 30 Assembly seats spread over 11 States.

In Bihar, fate of 1,318 candidates, including the RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, and the State Congress(I) president, Mr. Sadanand Singh, would be decided in the second phase of electioneering in the State.

The campaigning, which was marked by sporadic incidents of violence, was a low-key affair in the State due to the poll boycott call by the People's War Group and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC). The State is having a three-phase poll with polling already held for 108 seats on February 12, with an equal number of constituencies going to the polls in the third phase on February 22.

In Orissa, the battlelines were drawn between the ruling Congress(I) and the BJP-BJD combine as campaigning ended for 70 of



The Bihar Chief Minister, Mrs. Rabri Devi, addressing an election meeting in Rajgir on Tuesday. — PTI

the 147 seats going to the polls on Thursday, in the first phase of elections in the State. Polling for the remaining 77 seats would be held on February 22.

The Chief Minister, Mr. Hemanda Biswal, 13 members of his Council of Ministers, the State JD (U) chief, Mr. Narasingha Mishra, the BJD leader, Mr. Sachidananda Dalal, and about 50 rebel candidates of both the Congress(I) and the BJP-BJD combine are among the 384 contestants running.

The campaigning remained low-key in the Bellary parliamentary constituency in Karnataka also, where the Congress(I) has fielded Mr. K. Basavana Gowda,

former secretary of the Veerashai-va Vidyavardhaka Sangha, which runs a number of educational institutions in the area.

In Kannauj, in Uttar Pradesh, the main tussle is between Mr. Akhilesh Yadav, the Bahujan Samaj Party candidate, Mr. Akbar Ahmed 'Dumpy', a former MP, and Mr. Kalyan Singh's Rashtriya Krantikari Party nominee, Mr. Shaitan Singh Shakya. Barring a lone incident of violence in which a CRPF jawan was wounded, the repoll in 187 booths in 44 Assembly constituencies of Bihar passed peacefully today with an estimated 45 to 50 per cent voters casting their ballots.— PTI, UNI

THE HINDU

16 FEB 2000

Shoot orders in Bihar on eve of poll

410-1
17/2
By K. Balchand

PATNA, FEB. 16. The Bihar Government has issued 'shoot-at-sight' orders and deployed additional forces to check any outbreak of violence during the second phase of polling in 108 Assembly constituencies tomorrow. (In Orissa, where polling will be held for 70 Assembly seats, inter-State borders have been sealed and about 10,000 security personnel from CRPF deployed, according to PTI).

The Bihar Government has deployed about 500 companies of para-military forces in addition to 125 companies of the Bihar Military Police (BMP) to maintain law and order and instil confidence in the voters. Tomorrow's elections cover those regions where naxalites outfits have given a call for 'poll boycott.' But the real test is in the central and northern regions from where many gang leaders are trying their luck.

The Government's task has been made stupendous by the naxalite violence witnessed during the first phase on Saturday, in which 22 persons including 14 police personnel were killed.

The pre-poll violence in the second phase has claimed nine lives, including six members of the Suraj Bhan group. Suraj Bhan, crimelord, is contesting as Independent in Mokamah. Killings were also reported in the Harnaut and Asthanwan constituencies. Many constituencies where the underworld leaders seek election, were tense. Helicopters carrying



Security personnel on a march in Hajipur (Bihar) on Wednesday on the eve of the second phase of the Assembly election. — Photo: Ranjeet Kumar.

both NDA and Rashtriya Janata Dal leaders were attacked, adding to the tension.

Both the NDA and the RJD are wooing the Kurmi and Koeri voters. The forward caste alignment within the NDA seemed to have caused some resentment among these two intermediary backward castes. The Koeris seemed to have reacted sharply to the NDA favouring the forward caste in ticket distribution.

In tomorrow's elections, an electorate of 1.99 crores would decide the fate of about 1,315 candidates of whom 509 are Independents. The Congress(I) is con-

testing all the 108 seats. For the NDA, the Samata Party is contesting in 45 constituencies followed by the BJP (40), the JD(U) 14 and the BPP (4).

The ruling RJD is contesting 97 seats leaving the other 11 to the CPI(M) and the SJP. The CPI is contesting 58 seats, while its ally, the CPI(ML) has put up candidates in 40 constituencies.

In the fray are the RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav and 17 Ministers of the RJD Government, besides the PCC chief, Mr. Sadanand Singh, and the CPI Legislature Party leader, Mr. Ambika Prasad.

8 die in Bihar phase II poll

HTC and Agencies
New Delhi, February 17

AT LEAST eight people were killed and several injured as clashes, shootouts and firing today marred polling in the second phase of Assembly elections in Bihar.

Orissa witnessed by and large peaceful voting in the first round. An estimated 60 to 65 per cent voters participated in the elections in the two states.

A Samata Party candidate Raj Kumar Singh, contesting election from the Tarapur constituency, was among 500 persons arrested in Bihar. They were trying to hamper the poll activity. A poll observer has been "sacked for he was found incapacitated in his room." Transfer of Nawada Collector has been sought as he was found wanting in the discharge of his duties.

Chief Election Commissioner M.S. Gill while giving a round-up of the day's developments, said that five civilians were killed in Bihar when two groups indulged in firing on each other. The incident

took place some distance away from the polling booths.

The day passed off peacefully in Orissa where only a minor incident of snatching of two ballot boxes was reported. A repoll was likely to be ordered in the particular booth after studying report of the authorities concerned, Mr Gill added.

Referring to the near-peaceful polling day in Bihar, Mr Gill commented that the disturbing trend of violence in the State seemed to be going down. This was the result of

certain measures taken by the Election Commission and Bihar Government.

Paying tribute to the Bihar police and other Government officials for peaceful conduct of elections, he said it has proved that the official machinery could deliver desired results. It was made possible by the EC through making poll observers more active and proper deployment of police.

In addition to the Assembly elections in the two States, polling also

took place for the Kannauj Lok Sabha seat and eight Assembly segments of UP, three Assembly seats each in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, six seats in Rajasthan, one seat each in Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, four seats of Madhya Pradesh and two seats of Gujarat.

Nearly 55 per cent polling was registered in Kannauj where voting took place with electronic machines. In other Assembly elections 50 to 70 per cent voting took place.

A report from Kanpur said one person was injured when miscreants opened fire at a polling booth during by-election for the Kannauj parliamentary constituency.

Inspector General of Police, Kanpur range, said two persons opened fire at a booth in Khanpur village injuring one person. The two were immediately overpowered and arrested.

Bellary: Voter apathy was evident here right from the word go and polling failed to pick up even by afternoon, official sources said.

Exit poll analysis: page 10

DD EXIT POLL PROJECTIONS

CONDUCTED BY DRS

BIHAR: First & second phase

Forecast for 216 of total 324 seats

Vote share

Seats

NDA

RJD+Allies

Congress

Others

36%

25%

15%

22%

118

50

17

31

ORISSA: First phase

Forecast for 70 of total 147 seats

Vote share

Seats

NDA

Congress

Others

52%

35%

13%

56

8

6

Graphic by VINEY

Naxalite landmine blast kills 22 policemen in M.P.

By Lalit Shastri

BHOPAL, FEB. 20. Naxalites today inflicted a major casualty on the Madhya Pradesh police by blowing up a pick-up truck through a landmine blast this morning killing 22 police personnel, including an Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP), Mr. Bhaskar Deewan, near the Narayanpur police station in the naxalite-affected Bastar district.

The Madhya Pradesh Home Minister, Mr. Nandkumar Patel, and the Director-General

of Police, Mr. S.C. Tripathi, have rushed to Bastar to take stock of the situation. Senior district police officers have already reached the spot.

According to information received here, a police party, led by the ASP, Narayanpur, Mr. Bhaskar Deewan, had left the Narayanpur police station for a search operation around 9 a.m. morning in a pick-up truck after receiving information about the movement of a naxalite *dalam* (group) in the Bakulvadi area.

Besides Mr. Deewan, the police team in-

cluded a sub-inspector (Mr. B.S. Netam), an assistant sub-inspector (Mr. Surendra Singh), two head constables (Mr. Bansi and Mr. M. Haq) and 17 others. Twenty-one of these police personnel were killed on the spot when the naxalites blasted a landmine near the Kukrajhor-Kuchvahi turn about five kilometers from Narayanpur. Among those killed were two newly-recruited constables and three homeguards.

One policeman, who was injured and brought to the Narayanpur hospital, later succumbed to injuries. The incident was first reported at the Narayanpur police station by Mr. Satersingh Netam, who is a Janapad Chairman.

Today's blast is the fifteenth such naxalite-affected incident in Madhya Pradesh over a 10-year period. Last time such an incident was reported from Kiskoda in Kanker district of the Bastar division a year ago in which three policemen were killed. A few months before this incident, naxalites had killed 16 policemen in a landmine blast at Tarrem in Dantewada district.

In June 1992, 18 policemen were killed in a similar incident when the pick-up vehicle in which they were travelling was blown up by naxalites in the Golapalli police station area in South Bastar, which is presently the Dantewada district. In May 1991, five policemen and two others were killed in a blast at Bangoli under the Farasgaon police station area of Bastar district.

Recently, the State police had linked the naxalites with the brutal murder of the Madhya Pradesh Transport Minister, Likhiram Kavre, at his native village in Balaghat district last December. Kavre's widow has sought a CBI probe into the murder and the naxalite angle is yet to be ascertained.

Today's incident has raised the police casualty to 97 in all such incidents reported from different parts of the State since 1991.



The Madhya Pradesh Home Minister, Mr. Nand Kumar Patel (third from left), with the Director-General of Police, Mr. S. C. Tripathi (left), and the DGP, Intelligence, Mr. A. N. Singh (sporting a tie), and other top officials before leaving for the scene of blast. — Photo: A. M. Faruqui.

Bihar goes to the polls with borders sealed

By K. Balchand

PATNA, FEB. 21. The Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bangladesh borders, along or close to the State, have been sealed from both sides for tomorrow's third and final phase of polling, on which depends much of the State's political future.

The External Affairs Ministry has taken up with its counterpart in the two neighbouring countries the request of the Bihar Government to seal the borders to check the movement of anti-social elements across the frontiers. Sources said that both Kathmandu and Dhaka had agreed to the proposal and sealed the border.

With political tensions peaking for the final bout, which could make or mar the chances of the major claimants for power in the State, police have issued shoot-at-sight orders and have also sealed the borders with Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal to deny anti-social elements any leeway.

More than 425 companies of para-military forces, in addition to the Bihar Military Police, district police and home guards, have been deployed to maintain normality. The para-military forces conducted flag marches in sensitive area. The first two phases were marred by violence in which 35 people were killed.

Tomorrow's elections in 108 constituencies of 15 districts in the plains of north Bihar — considered the bastion of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) would decide whether the ruling outfit would be left with at least a fighting chance to retain power for a third stint in office.

The RJD's hopes are bolstered by the Doordarshan exit poll which has given the BJP-led NDA with just about 118 out of the 216 seats for which the polls had been completed in the first two phases.

RJD leaders have dubbed the exit poll as engineered by the BJP but underscored that by its own admission the BJP and its allies had not fared well and denied the prevalence of an anti-RJD wave in the State.

Irrespective of what the RJD may be making of the exit poll, the fact remains that the NDA faces the tough task of mustering



An armed supporter of a candidate, carrying the party symbol, in Betiya on Monday. — PTI

at least 45 out of the 108 constituencies going to the polls tomorrow for a possible majority in the 324-strong Assembly. The MY (Muslim-Yadav) factor will be decisive in at least three dozen constituencies.

The BJP is contesting 40 seats, while its other allies — the JD(U), the Samata Party and the BPP are in the fray in 35, 23 and 10 constituencies. The Congress(I) is contesting all the 108 seats, while the RJD has fielded candidates in 101. They are among the 1,326 candidates in the fray whose fate would be decided by an electorate of 1.98 crores.

PTI reports:

One candidate was arrested and several senior police officials were shifted on the directive of the Election Commission on the eve of the final phase of polling in Bihar.

Police said the Bahujan Samaj Party candidate for the Keteya Assembly constituency, Mr. Tej Prakash Singh, was today arrested in connection with cases relating to abduction and dacoity.

Shoot orders in Orissa

In Orissa, where polling will be held for the remaining 77 of the 147 seats, shoot-at-sight orders have been issued in "sensitive" constituencies with para-military forces and armed police person-

nel conducting flag marches today to instil confidence among voters amidst threat of violence and poll-boycott call by naxalites.

Prominent among those whose fate will be decided by an electorate of 1.30 crores include Union Mines Minister and BJD chief, Mr. Navin Patnaik, who is tipped to become the Chief Minister.

Alert in Manipur

In the insurgency-hit Manipur, security forces have been put on maximum alert in view of intensified underground activities and proposed "public curfew" called by the All-Manipur Students' Union during the polling for the remaining 32 of the 59 constituencies. Polling in one constituency has been suspended due to the killing of the JD(U) candidate. Counting of votes will be taken up on February 25.

Single phase in Haryana

Haryana will go for a single-phase polling tomorrow for choosing the 90-member Assembly from 971 contestants. About 50,000 security personnel have been deployed at 15,451 polling stations. Prominent contestants are the Chief Minister, Mr. Om Prakash Chautala, two former Chief Ministers Mr. Bansi Lal and Mr. Bhajan Lal, and the State Congress(I) Chief, Mr. Bhupinder Singh Hooda. — PTI

Resurgent Laloo gives NDA run for its seats

□ INLD gets majority in Haryana □ It's BJP in Orissa

The Times of India News Service and Agencies

PATNA: Defying poll predictions, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) led by Laloo Prasad Yadav seems to have halted the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) juggernaut in Haryana and Orissa.

While Mr Laloo Yadav has already won from both Danapur and Raghapur in Bihar, his party and its ally, the CPM, were leading in over 116 constituencies at the time of going to press. The BJP-led NDA, which polls had earlier predicted would get a clear-cut majority, was leading in only 112 seats.

For a simple majority, 162 seats are required in the 324-member Bihar assembly. As the Bihar results poured in, indicating a hung assembly, the Congress indicated a tie-up with the RJD for possible government formation in the state.

"He (Laloo Prasad) is a secular person, and his party is secular. We will try our best to keep the NDA out of power," Congress general secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad told a TV channel. However, he refused to commit himself to a tie-up saying, "It is too early."

It was a revival of sorts for the RJD in south and central Bihar as the party led in 14 assembly seats in the south and 29 seats in the northern part of the state.

The Congress is almost set to

retain its strength in the previous assembly as it was leading in 27 of the seats at time of writing. It had 29 seats in the last House. Among the Left parties, the RJD ally, the CPM, was leading in two constituencies while the CPI and

decisive say in the formation of the next government.

In Haryana, the ruling Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) led by Om Prakash Chautala was poised to retain power on its own, while its ally, the BJP, suffered major reverses. The elections saw the main opposition party, the Congress, markedly improving its strength in the 90-member House.

The INLD, needing 46 seats for a simple majority, had won 41 of the 77 seats for which results had been declared at the time of going to press and led in nine of the remaining 13 constituencies.

As expected, in Orissa the Biju Janata Dal-BJP alliance, riding on a strong anti-Congress wave, was poised for a landslide victory. Trends available by Friday night indicated that the alliance was likely to bag more than 100 seats. For the ruling Congress, the poll outcome could not have been more shocking. Even PCC chief and former chief minister J.B. Patnaik suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of sitting BJD MLA Ranendra Pratap Swain in Athagada.

In Manipur, the ruling Manipur State Congress Party was lagging behind, winning only three of the 13 seats declared by Friday evening, while the opposition parties shared the remaining ten.

► See Edit: Medium-gauge Mamata, Page 12



AS YOU SOW, SO SHALL YOU HEAP: RJD chief Laloo Prasad Yadav looks on with pride at the potato harvest garnered at the official residence of his wife, Rabri Devi, in Patna, even as the counting of votes began on Friday.

CPI-ML were leading in six and seven seats respectively. As many as 22 Independents were leading, indicating that they would have a

NDA, RJD AWAIT GOVERNOR'S DECISION

Situation fluid in Bihar

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 26. So near, yet so far. This is the predicament facing the National Democratic Alliance and the Rashtriya Janata Dal in the run-up to government formation in Bihar in the "hopelessly hung" Assembly.

All eyes during the next two days will be fixed on the Raj Bhavan in Patna and the bureaucrat-turned Governor, Mr. Vinod Pande. The criteria the Governor would adopt in extending invitation to any party or combination of parties to explore the formation of a government could clinch the issue of who will rule the State.

In taking the first step towards formation of the new government, will the Governor go by the established tradition of inviting the single largest formation with a pre-poll alliance or insist that the formation submit proof of its ability to win confidence of the Assembly? This is the question uppermost on the minds of party leaders.

The BJP spokesman, Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, has already declared that the NDA should be invited first by the Governor as it would be the single largest formation in the new Assembly. The Rashtriya Janata Dal chief and former Chief Minister, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, on the other hand, has debunked the NDA claim and said the Governor should call his party to form the Government as it had the best chances of securing the support of all parties outside the NDA net.

Both sides would require an additional support of 40 to 45 members to command a simple majority in the Assembly.

At a press conference, Mr. Venkaiah Naidu claimed that the BJP had already established contacts with parties such as the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (Soren) for support.

A senior BJP leader said the Congress(I) which managed to win 29 seats could not be expected to support the RJD and maintained that if the high command were to impose its will, there would be a vertical split in that



The RJD chief, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, exploring post-poll strategies over phone on Saturday. — Photo: Ranjeet Kumar

party. The Congress(I) leadership is in an unenviable position in Bihar. It does not want the NDA to form the Government and at the same time would not like to be

Party position

BIHAR: Seats 324; results declared 323.

RJD 123; BJP 67; Samata 34; JD(U) 22; Congress(I) 23; JMM (S) 12; CPI(ML) 5; CPI 6; CPI (M) 2; BSP 5. The result for Tariya is awaited.

MANIPUR: Seats 60; counting held at 58; results declared 55.

United Front: MSCP 21; FPM 6. Secular Democratic Front: Congress(I) 10; MPP 4; JD(S) 1. NDA: BJP 6; Samata Party 1. NCP 4; RJD 1; Independents 1.

ORISSA: Seats 147. BJD 68; BJP 38; Congress(I) 26; Others 5.

HARYANA: Seats 90. INLD 47; Congress(I) 21; Bharatiya Janata Party 6; Haryana Vikas Party 2; BSP 1; RPI 1; NCP 1; Independents 11.

seen as helping the return of RJD rule. A meeting of the Congress(I) Working Committee is scheduled for Monday to review the situa-

tion. While the CPI(M) appealed to all "secular" parties and groups to rally round Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav to keep out the BJP, the CPI, which opposed him in the elections, was extremely reluctant to support him.

The CPI general secretary, Mr. A.B. Bardhan, said his party would stay neutral and would abstain if the RJD is told to take a vote of confidence in the Assembly. If the NDA sought a vote of confidence, the CPI would vote against it.

The CPI(M-L), which had an electoral alliance with the CPI, is likely to pursue the same course.

"The CPI(M) appeals to all secular parties and groups to ensure that the verdict in Bihar, which is for a secular government, is respected ensuring that an RJD-led government comes into being," the party's politburo said in a statement.

PTI reports from Lucknow:

The Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, said a decision on the NDA staking its claim to form government in Bihar would be taken after the final results are out. He told reporters at the Amausi airport here "the reasons for NDA's dismal performance will also be analysed."

Confused Congress holds key in Bihar

CPI and CPI-ML undecided • JMM may back NDA

Vinod Sharma
New Delhi, February 26

LOCKED IN a touch-and-go battle, the ruling Rashtriya Janata Dal and the BJP-led NDA tonight awaited nods and numbers from among a crowd of other players with sizeable and marginal presence in a precarious-ly hung 324-member Assembly.

With a projected gap of barely one seat between the respective tallies of the two formations, scramble has begun for attaining the magic 163 mark.

The rival claimants to power have simultaneously come up with their own convenient arguments for the first gubernatorial go-ahead for Ministry making; the RJD flaunting its largest single party antecedents (plus the distinct edge it has in attracting additional numbers) and the NDA its status as a pre-poll alliance.

Together with 15 Independent legislators, the Congress (23) and the JMM-S (12) appear all set to play key roles in the RJD-NDA tussle to form a Government. Even as the Jharkhand Party offered support to the NDA, in return for a firm promise of Statehood for Vananchal, the mood seemed downbeat in Congress circles; the party caught in a cleft-stick over extending support to a "secular" rival it had so bitterly fought in the recent polls.

Also at stake in the Congress' case was its agenda of rebuilding base among Bihar's Dalits, Tribals

and the forward castes. Any attempt at reinstalling the RJD is expected to strike at the very roots of this objective.

Amid evidence of the central leaders' differing perceptions and the prospects of a rebellion by the Pradesh Unit, the Congress line on the tricky question wasn't immediately discernible. But from AICC general secretary Mohsina Kidwai's remarks, it seemed that Mr Laloo Yadav's loud secular-ver-

strength in the Assembly.

Quite significant in the obtaining fluid situation was the word of caution by CPI-M general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet, who told The Hindustan Times that the BJP's growth needed to be checked in Bihar, given the State's role in national politics. He was optimistic of a favourable Congress response to the RJD despite the initial discordant notes by a section of its State leadership.

An RJD ally in the just concluded polls, Mr Surjeet obviously is an interested party and might play a pro-active role in neutralising or bringing on Mr Laloo Yadav's side the other, relatively detached, secularists. But the problems of the Congress and the CPI's central leadership stem primarily from their local units utter distrust of the RJD.

In fact, a front-ranking CPI leader from Bihar, Mr Jalaluddin Ansari, has already ruled that the mandate was against the RJD, which has fallen far short of its 162 tally in the outgoing Assembly. Reacting on similar lines, CLP leader Ram Ashrey Prasad Singh sounded equally shrill while advising the Congress high command against any truck with Mr Laloo Yadav.

"We should not help the RJD. We have suffered for doing so in the past," remarked Mr Singh, who is among the prominent Congress losers in the Vidhan Sabha elections.

See also page 10

PARTY POSITION	
ORISSA:	Total seats : 147
BJD	68
BJP	38
CONGRESS	26
OTHERS	15
MANIPUR:	Total seats : 60
	Results declared : 55
UDF	27
MSCP	21
FPM	6
SDF	15
CONGRESS	10
MPP	4
JD(S)	1
MDA	7
BJP	6
SAMATA	1
OTHERS	6

Fractured verdict in Manipur

A CLEAR verdict remained elusive to all the three alliances in Manipur even though the ruling United Front (UF) decided to stake claim to form government having reached close to majority with 27 seats as results of 55 out of the total 60 Assembly seats were declared so far till tonight.

Hectic activities by the political parties have already started to ensure the required strength to form government. Leaders of Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP), major partner of UF and its ally Federal Party of Manipur (FPM) met at the CM's residence in the night to review the situation. The MSCP emerged as the single largest party with 21 seats.

UNI, Imphal

BIHAR ASSEMBLY PARTY POSITION	
Total seats : 324 Results declared : 291	
NDA	113
BJP	60
SAMATA	33
JD(U)	19
BPP	1
RJD ALLIANCE	110
RJD	109
CPM	1
CONGRESS	23
OTHERS	45

sus-communal implications might find a response in any CWC-endorsed face saving formula.

The predicament the Congress faced applied as much to the CPI and its Marxist-Leninist version, who won 11 seats as an anti-NDA and anti-RJD alliance. In pursuit of their policy of equal distance from the two major formations, these parties dropped broad hints of refraining from a vote against Mr Laloo Yadav's party in a trial of

Laloo calls up Sonia, CWC to meet soon

By Angana Parekh

100-1 27/2 ✓
9-8 Bihar ✓

NEW DELHI, FEB. 26. The Congress(I) Working Committee(CWC) is expected to meet soon, perhaps early next week, to decide its strategy on Bihar, including whether to support the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) or not.

Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, RJD president, today spoke to Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, Congress(I) President. Several Congress(I) leaders said they had received a phone call from Mr. Yadav, who said he had called "just to say pranaam." Mr. Yadav has declared that he would solicit the support of all secular parties. The Congress(I) is waiting emergence of the final picture in the State. Preventing the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance from forming a government would be an important element guiding the party's strategy.

"Our options are very limited," admitted Mrs. Mohsina Kidwai, CWC member and AICC general secretary in-charge of Bihar. Though the State unit would be consulted, the CWC would be the

final authority. Even if the party decides to support the RJD, it is not certain if it will give a letter of support nor if it will place any conditions. Asked if the party would go in for power sharing, a CWC member replied that this was unlikely. Yesterday, Mrs. Kidwai had said that it would be difficult for the Congress(I) to support the RJD, as it had severed its ties with the latter only a few months ago and campaigned against the RJD's "jungle raj" in Bihar. On the other hand, the NDA was "dangerous" for the whole country.

From the statements of party leaders, it seems that the Congress(I)'s central leadership is divided over the issue. One section of opinion is that the party should fo-

cus on reviving itself in the State and, therefore, not associate itself with the RJD. Some State leaders have reportedly warned of a split if the Congress(I) extends support to Mr. Yadav. The Congress(I) had always "sacrificed" its interests and supported secular forces (for instance, the United Front Government at the Centre), a senior leader remarked.

He pointed out that the Congress(I)'s vote percentage had risen to about 17 per cent., an increase of about seven per cent over the Lok Sabha elections when the Congress(I) and RJD had an electoral understanding.

PTI reports

Mrs. Sonia Gandhi remained non-committal on the issue. ✓

THE HINDU

27 FEB 2000

J&K will never become part of Pak.: Farooq

By Our Special Correspondent

JAMMU, FEB. 26. The Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, on Friday criticised the Central Government for releasing three top militants in exchange for the passengers of the hijacked Indian Airlines aircraft in December.

At a function here, Dr. Abdullah said, "Message has gone across the border that India is weak and we have succumbed to the pressure."

Later speaking at the second Amar Kapoor Memorial Lecture, organised by the State police, the Chief Minister said Jammu and Kashmir would never become part of Pakistan. Partition itself was a big mistake and it was followed by many others on the part of the Indian leadership.

"After partition the matters worsened as far as Kashmir is concerned." Jawaharlal Nehru took the issue to the United Nations where "the aggressor and the aggressed were treated at par" and even now Pakistan took advantage of the mistake.

Pakistan, he said, had violated the agreement signed by the then Maharaja of Kashmir. Even as a plebiscite was promised by India, Pakistan did not follow the agreement under which it had to withdraw from Kashmir. Instead, it

had annexed Gilgit, Baltistan, Sargardu.

Describing the Shimla Agreement as the "biggest blunder", he said Indira Gandhi should not have agreed to release 93,000 Pakistani soldiers, so that their relatives would have forced Pakistan to give up Kashmir in exchange for the soldiers.

CVC now targets Forest Dept. officials

NEW DELHI, FEB. 26. Continuing its crusade against bureaucrats facing corruption charges, the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), has now targeted the Indian Forest Service (IFS) by naming on its website 23 officials of the service.

The Commission last month had named 107 IAS and IPS officials. In the latest move, the commission has included the names of 23 IFS officials, against whom it has advised launching of criminal proceedings or imposition of major penalties.

The officers against whom it has advised launching of criminal proceedings include a Divisional Forest Officer in the north region, a retired Chief Executive in the Orissa forest Corporation and an Additional Chief Conservator of Forests. — PTI

THE HINDU
27 FEB 2000

Chautala invites BJP to join govt ■ MSCP hopes to retain power

Small parties hold Bihar key

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA, Feb. 26. — With the RJD and the NDA locked in a neck-and-neck race till tonight, smaller parties appear to be holding the key to the next Bihar government.

The RJD alliance has won 123 and the NDA 120 of the 319 seats declared so far — way behind the majority mark of 163 — setting the stage for intense bargaining with especially the Congress (23 seats) and the JMM-S (11 seats). A host of smaller parties — the CPI-ML (Liberation) with six seats; CPI with five; the BSP six; and Independents with 20 — can all help inch closer to the magic figure.

Mrs Sonia Gandhi today preferred to stay non-committal on the issue of extending support, but senior Congress leader, Mrs Mohsina Kidwai, said the choice before the party was limited, as the BJP was "the main enemy". BPC president, Mr Sadanand Singh, too, hinted that the Congress would support a "secular government" in Bihar. But he left the decision to the central leadership.

Even though Mr Yadav is banking on the Left parties and the Congress to help him out, the CPI and CPI-ML (Liberation) today issued a joint statement saying they would oppose both the NDA and the RJD. The CPI's central leadership, however, was yet to make the final move.

An undaunted Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav, however, asserted that his party was all set to retain power. "The RJD has emerged as the single largest party," he said and then reminded: "Former President, Shankar Dayal Sharma, has already set the precedent by inviting Mr Vajpayee — the leader of the single-largest party in the Lok Sabha in 1996 — to form the government."

The convention is there for the Governor to follow, he said. As of now, the RJD alone has 121 seats in the 324-member House as compared to the BJP's 67. The RJD chief said he was confident of getting a majority with the support of "secular parties". But "we'll quit gracefully if we fail to prove our majority and that's it."

On the other hand, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan and BJP leader Mr Sushil Kumar Modi, too, claimed that the NDA would form the next government. The BJP has apparently initiated a move to split the Congress. "A section of newly-elected Congress MLAs will join the NDA if the party leadership

ments were made.

The BJD-BJP combine's absolute majority will give the saffron party its first stint in the government of a major state in eastern India. The alliance won 106 seats in the 147-member Assembly, reducing the ruling Congress to 26 seats. The ruling party has lost 56 of the seats it won last time.

The BJD has won as many as 68 of the 84 seats it had contested, and the BJP 38 of the 63 seats it was allotted.

Among others, the JMM has three seats, while the CPI, CPI-M, Trinamul Congress and the JD-S took one seat each. Eight Independents, most of whom are rebel BJD and BJP candidates, have also won.

Manipur: The ruling MSCP-

led United Front has bagged 27 of the 55 seats declared, and is probably all set to return to power, says SNS from Imphal. The majority mark in the Assembly is 31, but the alliance hopes to win a few more, and is relying on the Governor calling them to take the first shot at government formation.

In the UF, the Federal Party of Manipur has done particularly well. Not only have all its three sitting MLAs been returned to the Assembly, the party has also gained two seats — one by beating a very prominent MPP leader, the former chief minister, Mr RK Ranabir.

A possible crisis for the UF may, however, be triggered by a tussle over the leadership, and the BJP's ambitions in the state.

Haryana: The BJP today had good news from Haryana. Fears that the INLD — which obtained majority on its own — would dump the party, vanished as Mr Om Prakash Chautala asserted that the BJP would be part of his government. Mr Chautala today formally staked his claim to form the new government.

The BJP has won just six seats, while the INLD has 46.

But Mr Chautala would have had a tenuous majority without the BJP, unless at least a section of the Independents (11 seats) were won over. Which is why the INLD chief today ignored any friction between the two parties and said he would meet Mr Vajpayee day after tomorrow.

The new INLD MLAs today formally elected Mr Chautala leader of the INLD legislative party. His Cabinet will be sworn in on 2 March at Kurukshetra.

Race for Bihar gains pace

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, FEB. 27. The entire establishment of the ruling National Democratic Alliance was engaged in finalising its strategy on how to secure the Bihar Governor's invitation for its nominee to form the next government. After the electorate returned a hung Assembly, it appears that Mr. Nitish Kumar, Union Minister for Agriculture, has been anointed as the NDA candidate for the Chief Minister's post. The other contender, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, does not seem very enthusiastic about the Nitish Kumar idea.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, himself went into a huddle, soon after returning from Lucknow, with the Bihar leaders. Senior NDA leaders present at his residence included Mr. George Fernandes, Mr. Sharad Yadav and Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan.

Mr. Vajpayee was briefed on the caucus that had taken place in the morning at Mr. L.K. Advani's residence; there, the Samata Party and Janata Dal (United) leaders were told of the decision that the BJP would not be pitching its claim for the Chief Minister's post. It was at this meeting that an agreement of sorts was reached on Mr. Nitish Kumar's name.

It is believed that the Prime Minister has cautioned the NDA against making any definite move till it is reasonably sure of its "numbers". There is a grudging realisation that the Governor, Mr. Vinod Pande, has a mind of his own and would go strictly by the book.

On the other hand, the Congress(I) establishment here is reported to be preparing the ground for ensuring that the NDA does not get to form the government. Ms. Mohsina Kidwai, AICC general-secretary in charge of Bihar, has been asked to contact the Bihar Congress(I) leaders and gauge their preferences in the matter of supporting Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal.

The final numbers from Bihar have a logic of their own, which neither the NDA nor the Congress(I) can overlook. Once it became clear that the NDA would not even be the largest combine, a somewhat dispirited alliance leadership found itself having to revise its argument. The NDA contention is that since the ruling RJD had failed to muster a majority, the electorate has endorsed Mr. Advani's "jungle raj" slogan. Hence, this is a consideration the Governor must keep in mind in deciding who should rule Bihar next.

BJP quotes Cong.(I) manifesto

In addition, the thrust of BJP's contention is that the Congress(I) could not possibly support Mr. Yadav and the RJD. The BJP spokesman, Mr. Venkaiah Naidu, cited chapter and verse from the Congress (I) manifesto to make the point that the party had mounted an unequivocal campaign against Mr. Yadav and his decade-old rule. Mr. Naidu also took comfort in the fact that the CPI had already announced that it would not support the RJD.

Whereas the argument being made within the Congress(I) is that at a time when the AICC was engaged in a frontal confrontation with the Vajpayee Government on the RSS issue, there was just no way the party could provide any aid and comfort to the NDA in Bihar. Nonetheless, the AICC establishment is aware of the strong anti-Laloo Yadav feelings in the Bihar Congress(I).

Unofficially, the BJP leaders were prone to whisper that should the AICC decide to support the RJD, there would be a split in the Congress(I) Legislature Party, but the Congress(I) leaders discount this. They point out that the very composition of the newly-elected Congress(I) MLAs would tilt the argument in favour of support to Mr. Yadav. There are five Muslims, nine Adivasis, two Dalits, two 'backwards', two Brahmans and three Bhumhars.

Of the three Bhumhars, two are counted as pro-Laloo Yadav voices.

On the contrary, Congress(I) sources point out that it is the JD(U) contingent that is vulnerable to poaching by Mr. Yadav. There are believed to be as many as 10 Yadavs among the newly-elected JD(U) MLAs; besides, according to the Congress(I) calculation, Mr. Laloo Yadav has the support of as many as 11 Independent legislators.

Rabri re-elected RJD leader

By K. Balchand

PATNA, FEB. 27. Having edged past the National Democratic Alliance, the ruling Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar re-elected the Chief Minister, Mrs. Rabri Devi, as its Legislature Party leader this evening. She will be staking her claim tomorrow to form the next Government.

Earlier, the RJD intensified its efforts on learning that the NDA had hurriedly decided on Mr. Nitish Kumar, Samata Party leader, as its choice for the Chief Minister's gaddi. The RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, not taking any chances, convened a meeting of the newly-elected MLAs in the evening where Mrs. Rabri Devi was unanimously elected the leader. Thanking the members Mrs. Rabri Devi said all of them should remain united. Mr. Yadav later told reporters that the RJD alliance had more support than the NDA and that the response of "secular-minded parties" to his request for support was good and that he was confident all of them would stand by the RJD to defeat the "communal forces".

Mrs. Rabri Devi is likely to call on the Governor, Mr. V. C. Pandey, tomorrow when she would submit her resignation and also stake claim to form the new Government.

RJD enlisting support: Page 13

Russia stands firm in backing India on Kashmir issue

MOSCOW: Post-Yeltsin Russia is firm in backing India on Kashmir and combating trans-national terrorism, Russian Duma speaker Gennady Seleznyov has said.

"Russia firmly stands for territorial integrity of India and supports its stance on resolving Kashmir issue on the basis of Shimla agreement of 1972," Mr Seleznyov said on Saturday in an interview to Moscow-based Indian media persons on the eve of his India visit.

Russia shares India's concerns regarding trans-border terrorism and separatism in Jammu and Kashmir and sees this as attempts by "certain" Pakistani circles to create one more hotbed of tension in the region threatening the stability in the sub-continent and beyond its border, Mr Seleznyov said.

He scheduled to reach New Delhi on Sunday night on a four-day official visit, accompanied by a 10-

member all-party delegation of the newly elected Russian lower house at the invitation of Lok Sabha speaker G.M.C. Balayogi.

Mr Seleznyov expressed Moscow's "full support" for the Indian government's steps to consolidate the unity and territorial integrity of the state. He hailed India's call for a "joint front" of interested nations for combating terrorism and stressed that its goal should be "isolation of extremism and influencing the governments of a number of Islamic states" in a co-ordinated manner.

"Of direct interest to Russia and India is the situation in few regions, where the centres for training of terrorists are formed and from where the idea of militant fundamentalism is being widely spread. They cause serious alarm and concern," Mr Seleznyov stated, noting that the so-called "recognition" of

Chechnya by Pakistan-backed Taliban was "one more link" in the chain of trans-national terrorism.

Mr Seleznyov, the first senior Russian leader to visit India after the surprise resignation of president Boris Yeltsin, expressed Moscow's gratitude for New Delhi's "principled and consistent" stand in backing Russian federal government's action for restoring constitutional order in Chechnya.

For bilateral interaction in combating trans-national terrorism, Mr Seleznyov called for invoking the provisions of the Indo-Russian Moscow declaration of 1992 on the protection of the interests of pluralistic states with multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual societies and hold joint consultations within the framework of inter-parliamentary union and other international fora. (PTI)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 FEB 2000

Cong seeks RJD support

NDA set to stake claim under Nitish

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SFI 28/2

NEW DELHI/PATNA, Feb 27. — The NDA has decided to stake claim to form the next government in Bihar under the leadership of Mr Nitish Kumar.

The alliance said it would approach the Governor to stake claim as it was the largest combination with "much more" than the requisite number to form the government.

Mr Kumar was chosen to lead the party in the state after the communication minister, Mr Ramvilas Paswan, declined to be the NDA leader in Bihar at a meeting of alliance leaders convened by Mr AB Vajpayee, at his residence here today.

Besides Mr Paswan and Mr Kumar, others present at the meeting were Mr LK Advani, Mr George Fernandes and Mr Sharad Yadav.

Mr Fernandes, announcing the NDA decision, said the decision was unanimous. "Though there has been lot of speculation outside the NDA, there were no reservations within", Mr Fernandes said.

"We have received, both in writing and verbal, support from Independents, political parties and rebels who have returned to the fold and all this add up to much more than the requisite numbers", the defence minister said.

The government formation exercise took a curious turn with the Congress demanding the RJD to support it in forming the next government.

"The Congress can think of going along with the RJD if the latter supported it in forming a secular government", the BPCC president, Mr Sadanand Singh, said. "We want a secular government in the state."

Mr Singh, however, said his party which has won 23 seats was examining "all the aspects" of government formation. "The party high command will take a final decision at an appropriate time". He said: "We are not in a hurry".

The Congress is divided over the issue of government formation. Five defeated party leaders led by the BPCC general secretary, Mr Anil Sharma, threatened to stage a "revolt" if the high command decided to support the RJD. Another section led by Mr Shakil-uz-Zamah advocated for the Congress's support to a "secular government".

Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav told reporters that the RJD Legislature Party leader would meet the Governor tomorrow to stake its claim for forming the government. "The Governor has no option other than inviting the RJD which has emerged as the single largest party."

He said his party had "the support of 50 more MLAs". "We are certain to prove our majority on the floor of the House".

The RJD Legislature Party tonight unanimously elected Mrs Rabri Devi as its leader.

■ More reports on page 8

Final tally	
RJD alliance	
RJD	123
GPJ-R	2
Total	125
NDA	
BSP	67
Samata Party	34
BJP	21
Total	122
Others	
Congress	23
JMM	12
CPY	6
CPJ-ML	6
BSE	5
Total Others	25

Congress watches as BJP changes tune

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 28. Even as the National Democratic Alliance's preferred chief ministerial candidate for Bihar, Mr. Nitish Kumar, rushed to Bihar hoping to make his claim to form a government before the Governor, the Congress(I) began the process of consultation with its MLAs to arrive at a decision on support to a Rashtriya Janata Dal government.

The Congress(I) spokesperson, Mr. Ajit Jogi, confirmed that talks were on with the RJD at the "formal and informal level." Mr. Prem Gupta, RJD Rejya Sabha MP, reportedly close to the RJD president, had been in touch with Congress(I) leaders.

The Congress(I) is also hoping to rush two observers, including Mrs. Mohsina Kidwai, to Bihar even as pressure from its MPs is building up in favour of supporting the RJD. "How can we allow a NDA government to be formed in Bihar when we have taken up the RSS issue at the Centre in a big way?" a Congress(I) leader asked. Groups of MPs, particularly from Karnataka, met the party president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, favouring support for the RJD.

As for the Bharatiya Janata Party, it has begun contradicting its

and the National Conference in the Twelfth Lok Sabha having fought a bitter election against them.

"We want to give Bihar a clean, honest and transparent government," Mr. M Venkaiah Naidu, BJP spokesperson and general secretary, said today. And he emphasised that it would not be right for the parties which had launched public agitations against Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav's "jungle-raj" to join hands with him now. In short, the BJP has taken upon itself to advise its political rivals what they should do. Without being specific on where the NDA would get support from, Mr. Naidu claimed that it was in a "better position" to form a government.

Mr. Naidu was also asked whether the NDA chief ministerial aspirant would like to serve Bihar as an Opposition leader if the NDA failed to form a government or would he then prefer to stay on as a Cabinet Minister at the Centre. The answer was non-committal. Separately, Mr. George Fernandes, convenor of the NDA, stated there was "no dispute of any kind" while deciding the leadership issue in favour of Mr Nitish Kumar.

Wait, says Governor: Page 13



Ms. Rabri Devi

Having failed to secure the position of being the single largest pre-poll formation — the RJD and CPI(M) alliance have beaten the NDA to this position by two seats — the party today extended a different argument. Parties which had fought the electoral battle against the "jungle-raj" of the RJD had no moral right to offer it any support of any kind now, the BJP stated, forgetting it had taken the support of the Telugu Desam Party, the Indian National Lok Dal



Mr. Nitish Kumar

own passionately favoured argument till yesterday that the single largest pre-poll alliance "must" be invited first by the Governor. There is also a move to repeat a Uttar Pradesh in Bihar by putting the newly-elected Assembly in "suspended animation."

The BJP, it seems, is hoping that given enough time it will be able to form an NDA government by breaking some other parties, a hope fuelled by fears about a split within the Congress(I).

Invitation after House is constituted: Bihar Governor

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE ^{5/1 29/2}

PATNA, Feb. 28. — Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav's efforts to form the government suffered a setback with the Bihar Governor refusing to give him an appointment today on the grounds that the "Election Commission has not yet notified constitution of the new House."

Any decision on the formation of the next government would be taken only after the listing of the newly elected legislators, he informed the RJD supremo.

Mr Yadav told reporters that "His Excellency conveyed to me he would entertain the RJD or other claimants to form the government only after the EC notified the constitution of the new House."

"The EC and the Centre will notify the new House by 1 March," Mr Vinod Chandra

NAVIN MEETS PM

NEW DELHI, Feb. 28. — Mr Navin Patnaik met Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee at his residence this evening. Mr Patnaik later said it was a courtesy call. He said matters relating to the formation of the coalition government were not discussed in the meeting. — UNI

■ Editorial: Laloo survives, page 8

Pandey informed Mr Yadav.

A section of the RJD leaders felt that the Centre was deliberately delaying the notification of the new House to allow the NDA to muster requisite support through horse trading.

The RJD supremo, however, asserted that he was confident

that the Governor would invite the RJD Legislature Party leader to form the government. "The RJD-led alliance is ahead of the NDA," he said, adding "there is no reason for the Governor to refuse the RJD to form the government." He also said the talks were in progress with the "secular parties" and he was sure of getting their support.

Meanwhile, the newly elected leader of the NDA, Mr Nitish Kumar and Mr Ramvilas Paswan, Mr George Fernandes, Mr Sharad Yadav and Mr Digvijay Singh arrived in Patna today. The NDA legislators at their formal meeting here elected Mr Kumar as their leader.

The arrival of the central ministers set in motion intense lobbying and horse trading. Mr Laloo Yadav was apparently

■ See BIHAR: page 6

BIHAR:

(Continued from page 1)

anxious that Mr Nitish Kumar may beat him in "money power". "I have reports that the special plane which brought the central ministers to Bihar also brought bundles of notes", Mr Yadav said.

Despite his efforts to put up a brave face, the initial euphoria in the RJD camp has evaporated with the NDA leaders' emphatic claim that the Governor would not invite the RJD "simply because it has emerged as the single largest party."

"If the Governor is convinced that the NDA can prove its majority he will invite the NDA", Mr Nitish Kumar said.

Speculations were rife in the political circle that the NDA leaders might suggest the Governor to put the House under suspended animation and impose President's rule in the state if they or the RJD failed to furnish in writing the support of 162 MLAs required to form the government.

The Samata Party state president, Mr Raghunath Jha said: "The people have voted out the Rabri government. The NDA will not allow it to return."

Mr Nitish Kumar claimed that the NDA would not indulge in horse trading. He said "the NDA has secured 32 per cent of votes against 28 per cent of the RJD".

THE STATESMAN
29 FEB 2000

LALOO SURVIVES

5/8
5/9
Bihar elections showcase despair

LALOO Prasad Yadav has reaffirmed his amazing capacity for survival by winning one seat more than the National Democratic Alliance. But he has had a lot of help from the opposition. There was the manifest inability to get their act together. First, Samata pulled out of the Janata merger at the last moment because it did not want Sharad Yadav as the leader of the reunited party. Then there was an imbroglio over distribution of seats, in which JD-U cosied up to the BJP and marginalised Samata. This was bound to create bitterness in the Samata rank and file. The message that percolated down was that the leadership was divided and incapable of formulating a coherent strategy. This ultimately meant that campaigning was not cohesive. Moreover, the electorate would have noticed the disunity in the NDA. It is possible that the NDA put too great a store by their admittedly comprehensive victory in the Lok Sabha elections in Bihar. The alliance ought to have remembered that the RJD polled 37 per cent of the votes as against the approximately 41 per cent polled by it. This should have warned against complacency, but obviously did not. Then there was the matter of the assets cases against Laloo. The Centre reportedly reined in the CBI until after the elections. Besides if anyone thinks the fodder scam was the limit have another guess coming. Laloo is unrepentant and has never left off. The proper thing was to allow the law to take its course. Even politically it would have been a more rewarding strategy. The NDA leadership probably reckoned that it would come to power and finish Laloo decisively. Overweening ambition and disrespect for the sanctity of legal processes has thus done them in.

Laloo Yadav has done well, given the prognostications, in all of Bihar. The largest share of seats has come from his north Bihar stronghold. But the RJD performed creditably in central Bihar, and even wrested a few seats in the south where traditionally they have had little support. Given the numbers, the Governor must give the RJD the first chance to form a government. The NDA does not have numbers. Even assuming that the alliance will get JMM and independent support, it will not get anywhere near 160. 162 is needed for a majority. On the other hand the RJD can cobble together an alliance. The Congress have no choice but to extend support. And even if the CPI/Liberation front refuses, Independents and small parties are likely to support Laloo. But for the poor and oppressed of Bihar, there is no glimmer of light. Elections will not alter their lot. They can now look forward to five more years of mis-governance. It is useless to expect Laloo to make any effort to implement land reforms, welfare provisions and initiate a push towards development. The voters vote Laloo to power because they know that the others are no better. That is the tragedy of Bihar, exposed cruelly at regular intervals.

THE STATESMAN

29 FEB 2000

PWG has awesome arsenal

Ashok Das
Hyderabad, January 3

THE PEOPLE'S War Group (PWG), the most feared extremist Left group, today comprises 1,100 full-time underground cadres, thoroughly trained in guerrilla warfare, besides over 5,000 over-ground militants.

According to police sources, the PWG has 54 *dalams* (forest squads) in Andhra Pradesh alone, with each *dalam* comprising nine to 12 members. They are said to have another dozen *dalams* in other states.

The outlawed group has raised four military platoons comprising 25-30 cadres each. Like any military organisation it conducted periodic military training

including jungle warfare skills for its cadres. Its cadres are also conversant with techniques of insurgency such as mine-laying and ambush.

PWG has a well-defined organisational structure. At the top is the central organising committee comprising 15 members. Next in the hierarchy is the provincial committee, which is followed by district committees and the central guerrilla squad. At the village level there is the village committee and local squads. The party is led by the elusive Muppala Laxaman Rao alias

Ganapathi, who carries Rs 12 lakh reward on his head.

The PWG has an awesome arsenal. According to State Director General of Police H J Dora, it possesses a total 1,690 weapons including 90 AK-47 rifles, 650 revolvers and pistols and 950 other weapons such as carbines, DBBL (double barrel) and SBBL guns, tapachas and country guns. Dora says that besides the PWG, some other groups are equally dangerous and ruthless but these groups were limited to small pockets.

The Naxals operate hardcore groups of armed men and are supported by a string of frontal

and its seven front organisations were banned on May 21, 1992. According to the police, during the last 10 years, the PWG and other extremist groups killed as many 1,960 people, including 1,615 civilians and 345 policemen in the State.

The People's War Group has not been very kind to political parties too. During the last 10 years as many as 220 political leaders were killed. They include 68 TDP functionaries, 66 Congress activists, 23 BJP workers, 17 Communist Party of India cadres, 12 CPM cadres and 34 other political activists.

The police say that the PWG has degenerated into a lumpen outfit as most of its cadres have no ideological mooring and have joined the radical group after being

attracted by the Robin Hood image.

To substantiate its stand, the police say that the majority of its victims included innocent and poor people, who can by no stretch of imagination be called class enemies.

The Director General of Police said that of the 1,960 people killed by Naxalites during the last 10 years as many as 1,268 belonged to backward classes and another 263 to Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Only 410 people belonged to other castes, he added.

Naxal Movement in Andhra Pradesh

organisations of students, youth, industrial workers, miners, farm hands, women, poets, writers and cultural artists.

The PWG runs a parallel government in parts of the State. The *dalams* are said to have taken over revenue collection, policing besides settling land and other disputes in many villages. This has been possible as officials rarely visit villages fearing Naxal reprisals.

The PWG-sponsored violence has witnessed a spurt since 1990, particularly after the group

Dual loyalties

96-8 Rescind Gujarat's decision on RSS

GUJARAT'S BJP government has been unwise in lifting the ban on government employees joining the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Henceforth police personnel and teachers can all be indoctrinated by the RSS. It is foolish to pretend the RSS is a cultural organisation. That little fiction was exposed long ago. The RSS has an ideology which it propagates sedulously. As long as there is no breach of the law or the peace, it is at liberty to do so. What the BJP in power is doing is to spread in insidious fashion the saffron ideology of the RSS and that is not acceptable. The question the Gujarat government must answer is, why has it amended its civil services rules to allow employees to become full blown members of the RSS? Minister of State for Home Haren Pandya speaks at length of the technicalities of seeking and receiving Central government clearance but that is not the point. The point is, is it healthy for government servants to undergo ideological training in RSS shakhas or be schooled in any other ideology for that matter? Pandya says the RSS is a patriotic, service-oriented organisation.

BJP politicians whose souls belong to the RSS are bound to give it glowing recommendations. Other organisations in whose activities government servants are not allowed to participate would describe themselves in similarly flattering terms. The list includes the Anand Margis, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Jamaat-e-Islami, groups propagating sati and so on. Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel should ask himself how the government would run with a committed Anand Margi for chief secretary and the

home and education departments packed with members of the VHP and fundamentalist Muslim groups. Perhaps he intends all civil servants to wear two badges identifying their function and their ideological orientation. Perhaps government works best when its officials are pulling in different directions!

It will be said the RSS is different. But even its most ardent supporters cannot deny it has a particular world-view and its business is to further that world-view. That puts it at odds with the civil service which must be designed to function without bias in a multicultural world, a world of many viewpoints. It would be surprising if there were not many closet members of the RSS in Gujarat's government offices. The state turned determinedly saffron in the course of the last decade and civil servants have not escaped the infection. But it is one thing to be a secret sympathiser and quite another to make it legitimate to identify with the RSS, to become a formal member of the organisation and be sworn to further its goals and aims. Civil servants are paid to function impartially and must recognise no higher authority than the law of the land. They are bound by government rules, not Hedgewar's rules. The distinction between a civil servant and an RSS activist or Anand Margi is important and must be maintained. When a policeman puts on khaki shorts and drills with the RSS, he is no longer a policeman. Ideologies corrupt the civil services. All the people cry out for is efficient, responsive service, not saffron or red or green biases. Gujarat's decision is bad and should be reversed immediately.

INDIAN EXPRESS

6-7 JAN 2000

EC FIAT TO U.P. ON TRANSFERS

Bihar not to present vote-on-account

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

NEW DELHI, JAN. 10. Following a directive from the Election Commission, the Rashtriya Janata Dal Government in Bihar has decided not to seek a vote-on-account for the expenditure required by the State beyond March 31, 2000.

It would, however, present supplementary demands for grants to meet gaps in the current financial year. The term of the Assembly is to expire in April this year and the Election Commission has already ordered fresh elections in the State in the second/third week of February.

The Commission's directive followed apprehensions from Opposition parties that the ruling party could go ahead with presentation of the vote-on-account during the current session of the State Assembly which began today.

The parties' contention was that the presentation of the vote-on-account would amount to a violation of the model code of conduct which restrains the State from announcing any new programmes or schemes. The Oppo-

sition parties had complained to the Election Commission that the RJD Government could utilise the brief Assembly session on the eve of the elections to gain electoral mileage.

Senior Election Commission officials said the State Government had promised that it would not present the 2000-2001 Budget and leave the matter to the new Government. The RJD Ministry headed by Mrs. Rabri Devi also indicated to the Commission that since the new Assembly would have enough time in March this year, it did not propose to seek a vote-on-account for the first quarter of the new financial year.

The Commission also directed the BJP Government in Uttar Pradesh not to transfer any poll officer till the by-elections to the Kannauj Lok Sabha constituency and eight Assembly segments scheduled for February 17 were over.

In a letter to the State Chief Secretary, the Commission said the model code of conduct would become effective throughout the State, including the districts in which the constituencies going to

the polls fell. The Commission said no election-related officer should be transferred from January 7, the day the polls were notified, till February 26. The letter specifically said the officers would remain in their positions, being held since January 8, till February 26.

In another development, the Samajwadi Party said it had an open mind on the question of an electoral understanding with the RJD in the Bihar Assembly scheduled next month. The SP and the RJD were part of the Rashtriya Loktantrik Manch which virtually became defunct following differences between Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav on the question of support to the claim made by the Congress(I) president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, to form a Government after the fall of the Vajpayee Government in April last year.

At a news conference here today, the SP general secretary, Mr. Amar Singh, said the party's electoral strategy for the four Assembly elections would be decided at the Parliamentary Board meeting on January 14.

THE HINDU
11 JAN 2000

JD-U holding up Bihar seat pact, says Samata

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 20. — Seat talks for the Bihar Assembly polls continued to be stalemated today as the Janata Dal (United) reportedly balked at a BJP-Samata formula.

Samata Party leaders spelt out the formula: multiply by six the number of seats a party contested in the last Lok Sabha polls. What makes everything simple is that every one of Bihar's Lok Sabha constituencies has six Assembly segments.

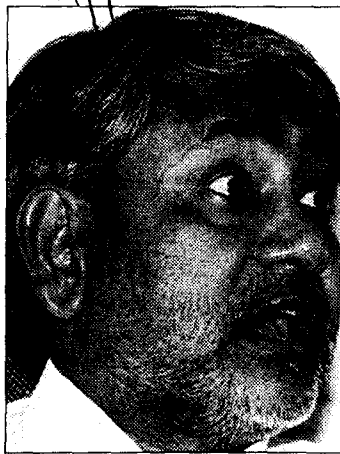
"The BJP and Samata have agreed," it's the JD-U that has been holding out, a Samata leader said.

The arrangement leaves Samata, which contested 16 Lok Sabha seats, with 96 Assembly seats. The JD-U (7 LS seats) gets 42 Assembly seats; Bihar's People Party gets 12; and the BJP, which contested 29 Lok Sabha seats, bags the lion's share of 174 Assembly seats.

The Samata general secretary, Mrs Jaya Jaitley, said her party had agreed to contest 96 seats. But the JD-U general secretary, Mr M Raghupathy, said "the discussions have to be continued".

Though the JD-U hasn't made its target public, a party functionary said in private it wants at least 60 Assembly seats.

A Samata leader said that at



Mr Nitish Kumar: Samata's likely choice for Chief Minister

a meeting this morning, the BJP was urged "to be firm with the JD-U because time is running out" and the first list of candidates hasn't been released yet.

The BJP was also told that if any concession must be made to JD-U, the seats must come from the BJP's share, for the Samata has already reduced its demand from 130 seats to 96.

JD-U concern: It is the post-poll scenario that prevents the JD-U from accepting a share of 42 seats. A party leader said that if the alliance comes to power, the race for chief ministership would hot up.

With none of the partners having projected a chief ministerial candidate, each would

vie for the top post. While Mr Sushil Modi or Mr Kailashpati Mishra is likely to be the BJP candidate, the Samata would probably push Mr Nitish Kumar.

The JD-U "doesn't want to lag behind", the leader said. But if the party doesn't win enough seats, it would not be in a position to stake claim for the top job. And the JD-U is keen to avoid such a possibility.

Meanwhile, BJP vice-president Mr JP Mathur blamed the delay in releasing the candidates list on the the lack of agreement between Samata and JD-U. He, however, said the list might be released tomorrow, indicating some progress has been made.

The BJP's central election committee met here for about two hours today in the presence of Mr AB Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani. Mr Mathur said the committee would not meet again till 27 January. He said his party wants to field all its sitting MLAs in Bihar.

Other states: No pact has been reached in Haryana, where the BJP has asked for 35 seats, Mr Mathur said. INLD chief Mr OP Chautala might seek an appointment with Mr Vajpayee.

In Orissa, talks are on with the BJD. In Manipur, the BJP will contest a handful of seats, so there's no problem with allies, Mr Mathur said.

Confusion in Bihar

WITH THE approach of the Assembly elections in Bihar, a new configuration of forces has begun to take shape. While the BJP-led alliance seems to enjoy an edge over the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), it is unlikely to be a cakewalk for it. Two of Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav's allies, the Congress and the CPI, have deserted him, but Mr Yadav is far from becoming politically untouchable. The decision of the CPI-M, Janata Dal (Secular) and the Samajwadi Janata Party (SJP) to forge an alliance with the RJD can be characterised as a marriage of convenience but it is bound nevertheless to strengthen the hands of the scam-tainted leader. CPI-M leader Harkishan Singh Surjeet calls it a secular alliance but the need for sheer survival may have prompted him to jump on to the RJD bandwagon, for his party needs a helping hand in Bihar. Former Prime Ministers H. D. Deve Gowda and Chandra Shekhar, the two has-beens who head the two other parties in the new front, also had hardly anyone else to turn to. Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav faces by far the strongest challenge to his authority in this election. He has to contend with the twin threats of an anti-incumbency factor and the newly fortified anti-RJD platform. Mr Yadav is clearly no longer electorally invincible. The decision by Chief Minister Rabri Devi not to contest the elections may be a measure of the party's nervousness. But, even then, Mr Yadav still attracts large crowds and multi-cornered contests may help him to minimise the damage to his party's prospects.

The BJP-led alliance also has its share of problems. The BJP is unlikely to accept less than 50 per cent of the seats. It is the Samata Party which has been asked to accommodate the highly ambitious JD-U leaders. Given the imperative need to maintain unity to defeat Mr Yadav, the feuding leaders might eventually agree on a patch-up, but Mr Yadav can still hope to benefit from the tension within the saffron alliance. The CPI's tie-up with the CPI-ML (Liberation) may not yield many seats but it can damage the RJD-led alliance. Since the Congress, which is ploughing a lonely furrow, may cut into the BJP's vote bank among the upper castes, Mr Yadav hopes to make up for some of his losses. These cross-currents have made the scene in Bihar more confusing than what it was in the aftermath of the parliamentary polls when the BJP and its allies were expected to have an easy ride.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 JAN 2000

Shame of Gujarat ^{HPB}

GUJARATIS LIKE to claim that they are India's leading community. Were it not for Mahatma Gandhi, they say, we would never have got rid of the British. Another Gujarati, Vallabhbhai Patel, united India. A third Gujarati, Morarji Desai, restored order out of the terror of the Emergency. And so on.

One wonders, therefore, what proud Gujaratis will make of the picture this paper published last Sunday. It showed Gujarat Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel, outfitted in full knickerwallah gear: Khaki shorts, knobby knees, an incongruously expensive pair of Nike trainers and a Wee Willie Winkie woollen cap. Even those who argue that one should not be swayed by appearances will be horrified by the Gujarat government's record as listed on the same page. In August 1996, the Sangh parivar ransacked the Husain-Doshi Gufa in Ahmedabad and vandalised works of art. In June 1998, copies of the Bible were burnt in a Rajkot school. In July 1998, the Bajrang Dal beat up students at Ahmedabad's Centre for Environment, Planning and Technology and ordered the girls not to 'imitate Madonna'. In the same month, a corpse was exhumed from a Christian cemetery and dumped by the river in Kheda district. At roughly the same time, over 50 Muslim families were driven out of their villages by VHP activists. In December 1998, just as Christians were planning a protest rally, the government announced that grants-in-aid to their schools would be stopped. That month, huts used as churches by tribals in Dangs district were torched. In July 1999, the Bajrang Dal set fire to an Ahmedabad restaurant partly owned by a Muslim; the owner was killed in the fire.

The list goes on and on. What is most reprehensible is that far from showing any remorse, the Gujarat government seeks to legitimise the intolerance. It all but encourages government servants to join the RSS and puts itself forward as the 'laboratory' of the Sangh parivar. Two conclusions follow from the Gujarat experience. The first is that we should not let the relative moderation of the Vajpayee-led NDA government in New Delhi blind us to the true nature of the Sangh parivar. The men who run Gujarat are only a few heartbeats away from the centre of power in Delhi. The second conclusion is that no Gujarati can be proud of the way his State is governed. Gujaratis have always distinguished between their state — which they view as cultured and sophisticated — and the states of the Hindi belt — which they see as less sophisticated. But, say this for UP and Bihar: things have never been as bad in those states as they are today in Gujarat. We have travelled a long way from the days of Gandhi and Patel.

Unfriendly contest for NDA in Bihar as Samata-JD(U) street-fight erupts

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: In a bizarre play of power politics, the Samata Party and the Janata Dal (United), calling each other names in public, formally parted ways even as they resolved to contest the Bihar assembly polls unitedly, under a BJP-initiated common programme and manifesto.

With this the seat-sharing talks within the National Democratic Alliance for the Bihar polls has gone haywire and a worried Bharatiya Janata Party, awaiting resolution of their differences, staggered formal talks among the alliance constituents. The 'friendly contests' may now be avoided through talks next week.

After the shocking derecognition of its top brass by the Election Commission, the Samata Party elected Jaya Jaitly as its president and sought a 'separate identity' and seats for its MPs in the Lok Sabha

while accusing the JD(U) of 'betrayal'. Ms Jaitly, who had been the general secretary so far, was elected president at an emergency meeting of the party's national executive hours after the EC's order. This is seen as a bid to overcome the bar on George Fernandes and nine other MPs to distribute party symbol to its candidates in the coming assembly elections.

A resolution unanimously electing Ms Jaitly as president, who will exercise all the powers including signing forms 'A' and 'B' under the election symbols order was adopted at the meeting attended by 21 members of the executive. This was a temporary measure for six months, meant mainly to get over the procedural pre-poll problems.

Later, party leader and Union agriculture minister Nitish Kumar accused JD(U) of 'betrayal' that led to the EC's derecognising its leaders. Mr Kumar contended that what had

been signed by all was a 'draft' prepared and signed 'in good faith' to be taken up only after a formal merger. Since the Samata was opting out of a merger, the JD(U) had no business to send such a letter, notarised in the name of Fernandes on a day he was away, to the EC. He called it a *ghatiya harkat* (mean trick).

Mr Fernandes met Speaker Balayogi on Friday and sought separate identity and seating arrangements for 12 MPs belonging to the party. Samata claimed that the 12 included minister of state and Lok Shakti MP Srinivasa Prasad and nominated MP Beatrix D'souza. Mr Prasad is a confidante of Lok Shakti chief Hegde and his inclusion in the Samata list seemed like a tit-for-tat to the JD(U) which had cocked a snook by moving the EC when it was more than clear that having got elected on the JD(U) symbol, the Samata MPs were in no mood for a merger.

Manoeuvres in Bihar

CONSEQUENCES OF power play can be both surprising and diverting. Imagine the plight of a heavyweight of the Vajpayee Cabinet like George Fernandes when he is told by the Election Commission that he is not what he thinks he is, namely the president of the Samata Party. This is sure to have raised a chuckle among his colleagues in the National Democratic Alliance, foes and friends alike.

Even more shocking for the party would have been the forced realisation that none of its 12 Lok Sabha MPs can pretend that they represent the party they think they do. Thus, we now know that Samata MPs, who include NDA's provincial satraps like Nitish Kumar — very much a central figure in the context of Bihar politics — are properly speaking elected representatives of the people who arrived in Parliament on the ticket of the Janata Dal (United), a party with which they had disdainfully declined to merge a fortnight ago though merger talks were conducted in the light of the forthcoming assembly elections in Bihar and everyone was professing the need to unite all hands on deck to defeat the "corrupt" Laloo Yadav "dictatorship".

Not unexpectedly, the dozen Samata MPs have sought to become an independent bloc in the Lok Sabha in the first instance. This is a procedural requirement. Being 12 out of the total JD (U) bloc of 22, they will easily overcome the anti-defection law and, after a decent interval, make moves to merge with the Samata, a party whose technical existence outside Parliament is not in question. Thus, really speaking, the Samata MPs will be merging into their own party!

This unusual happening is, of course, being thrust on them by the contingencies of our extraordinary anti-defection law which, in reality, has done so little to check defections or foster political morality. But more significantly, in the context of power politics in Bihar, it says a great deal that the Samata does not wish at any cost to join hands with the JD (U) and associate groups like Hegde's Lok Shakti even to achieve the goal of defeating Laloo Yadav. The obvious reason is that Samata leaders calculate that they will be contesting a greater number of

seats if they did not have to share with anyone what is left after the BJP, the non-Lohiaite element of the menagerie, is given its cut of the total of 324 constituencies for the state assembly. Though exactly two days remain for the filing of nominations for the polls, it may still be an open question what that figure is going to be. This shows the degree of brinkmanship that is afoot within the NDA.

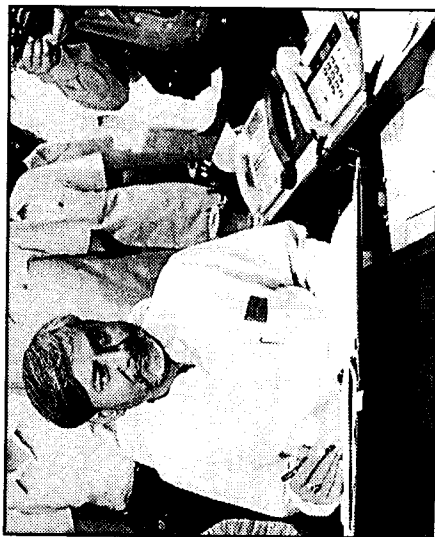
While the BJP itself may desire 50 per cent, the logic of the situation brought on by Samata may suggest that the latter would want the BJP, the senior partner, to offer seats to a party like the JD (U) out of its share, rather than permit a dwindling of its own kitty. Quite clearly, Samata is looking to capture the chief ministership, and is doing what it can before the polls to clear the path. And no one in the Samata can be in any doubt that it is Nitish Kumar, the Union agriculture minister, who may have pre-empted the entire exercise.

Although elected from Bihar for many years, George Fernandes, Samata's national mascot, can hardly enter his claim for the chief ministership of that state. Moreover, given the substantive political role he has played within the NDA, Fernandes cannot be faulted if he sets his sights higher and leaves the Bihar big cherry, should it be within grasp, to his younger colleague. The fiery George, of course, must go along with his colleague's ambitions, as he

depends to an appreciable extent on the caste appeal of the latter to keep the political cash register ringing since the original Lohiaite backward caste vote bank in the state has stood sundered in recent years. And without the political capital provided by the bloc of Bihar MPs, there is no play for Fernandes at the Centre.

It is a commonplace to suggest that Nitish Kumar split from Laloo Yadav on the question of power. Quite rightly he realised that he had no chance so long as the latter remained strong. And he fancied his chances as a better leader because he is no country bumpkin, and is decidedly more sophisticated than most Bihar leaders, and infinitely more than his former friend who was a co-equal and a comrade through the years of the Jayaprakash Narayan-led agitation which brought the younger crop of Lohia socialists to the fore.

But given his much narrower Kurmi caste base, as compared to that of the sturdy and preponderant caste support of the Yadavs that Laloo Yadav naturally commanded, Nitish Kumar found himself at a loose end until the BJP's national profile began to rise, and the party began to look for a viable niche in Bihar's caste jungle, without which its political dominance over the country would always be shadowed by doubt, even if it took Uttar Pradesh. Thus, in the context of history, Nitish Kumar and the BJP turned out to be made for each other, even



If the NDA botches its chances in Bihar on account of squabbling, the ensuing bitterness could cast its shadow over the allies in Delhi

if one came from the "secular", although "casteist" stream, and the other made no bones about its political Hindutva. Indeed, in Bihar the schism in the casteist paradigm of the backward classes movement can be said to be a prime mover in facilitating the advance of communal politics, taking the decline of the Congress system as a given.

The question is, will the contest for power impose end limits on the Nitish-BJP entente in the near future? Much, of course, will depend on how successfully the two sides negotiate the labyrinths they encounter. But it can be said that Laloo Yadav, after faring way below par in the last Lok Sabha election, is perceived to be the weakest he has ever been, and alternative power centres aiming for control of Bihar are apt to think that their moment has arrived. This means not just the Samata and the BJP, but also the JD (U) in the shape of Ramvilas Paswan who, in the last one year, has done his bit to enhance his acceptability to the BJP.

It is a valid question why the BJP should not want its own nominee for the chief minister's job, and entertain the claims of others, no matter how friendly or useful they may have proved in the past. Part of the reason, of course, is that the Hindutva party wins its Bihar seats mainly in plateau (tribal) Bihar, and not in the populous Bihar plains. It is this which permits its allies to harbour hopes and ambitions. Of course, the end result will have much to do with who wins how many seats. But that will depend on who contests how many seats. The bargaining could thus be sharp.

Two things can, however, be said straightaway. One, the sense of uncertainty arising out of the bargaining among the NDA allies on the eve of the assembly poll may already have given Laloo Yadav, their common adversary, some edge in consolidating the backward caste votes, especially that of the Yadavs who, in the light of what they see, may decide to stick with their old leader, whose rule has brought them economic benefits as well as political power, rather than opt for the uncertainty placed on view by the NDA. Two, if the NDA botches its chances in Bihar on account of squabbling over seats, the ensuing bitterness could cast its shadow over the allies in Delhi.

24/1

NDA accord on seat-sharing in Bihar

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, JAN. 23. The National Democratic Alliance partners in Bihar hammered out a seat-sharing agreement for the State Assembly polls today after a five-hour meeting between the senior leaders of the four parties — the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Samata Party, the Janata Dal (United) and the Bihar People's Party — at the residence of Mr. L. K. Advani, Union Home Minister.

The breakthrough came after the parties agreed to let Mr. Advani have the last word on which party should contest how many of the total of 324 Assembly seats in Bihar. The BJP will be contesting 150 seats, the Samata 90, the JD(U) 64 and the BPP 20, according to the formula announced jointly by Mr. Advani, the Samata leader, Mr. George Fernandes, the JD(U) leaders, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan and Mr. Sharad Yadav and the BPP chief, Mr. Anand Mohan Singh.

All the four parties will contest the elections under a common manifesto and conduct a joint campaign on a common platform, Mr. Advani said. He also stated categorically, "we are not projecting anyone as the chief ministerial candidate although every party has its own candidate for the post." The common aim was to "fight unitedly to end the jungle raj (of Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav)."

For over a week the NDA partners had not been able to arrive at a satisfactory arrangement mainly because of the Samata's refusal to scale down its demand and the JD(U)'s insistence that it be allowed to contest "as many seats as the Samata."

Finally, the two biggest partners in this enterprise, the BJP and the Samata, had to be "magnanimous" in "accommodating" the other, as the BJP general secretary, Mr. K. N. Govindacharya, put it.

The parties are now expected to identify the seats to be contested by each of them. The priority is to share the 108 seats going to the polls in the first of the three-phase elections for which tomorrow is the last day for filing nominations. Till late tonight this was being done at another meeting at the residence of Mr. Yashwant Sinha, Finance Minister. Since, in the first phase, almost 70 seats are from south Bihar, where the BJP has a strong base, the majority of them will fall in the party's quota.

The formula that "clicked" seems to be almost the reverse of the seat-sharing arrangement in the 1999 Lok Sabha polls. Then, the BJP contested 29 seats leaving 25 for the other three partners. For the Assembly elections this time, the BJP is contesting 150 seats, which account for 25 Lok Sabha seats, leaving 174 for the other three accounting for 29 Lok Sabha constituencies.

In Bihar, six Assembly segments make up each of the Lok Sabha constituencies. Basically, the BJP climbed down from its earlier-demand of 162 seats, dropping 12, while the Samata was forced to shed 18

seats from the 108 it had demanded. If last year's plan had been followed, the Samata's share would have been 96.

If the neat division of seats actually works on the ground, it is expected to be to the NDA's advantage. But the recent bitterness, especially between the Samata and the JD(U), may in fact mean that at the ground level the two parties might even indulge in sabotage. Much will also depend on the parties' ability to prevent rebel candidates from contesting.

Laloo to contest from Danapur

UNI reports from Patna:

The former Chief Minister and RJD chief, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, will contest the Assembly elections from the Danapur constituency.

Releasing the candidates' list here today for the first phase of election scheduled for February 12, the party spokesman, Mr. Shivanand Tiwari, said eight seats had been left to the CPI(M), two to the Samajwadi Janata Dal (Rashtriya) and another to the Janata Dal (Secular).

Nitish Kumar unhappy — Page 13

BJP prefers JD (U) to Samata as ally in Bihar

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Even before the beginning of the Bihar road show, the BJP seems to have had second thoughts about the two major partners it should ally with, and has apparently preferred the JD (U) to the Samata Party.

The party's perceived move to distance itself from its older partner in Bihar has been attributed as much to the latter's "aggressive and unreasonable bargaining" for seats as to its larger gameplan in the post-poll scenario.

The BJP still feels that going by its partner's performance in the Lok Sabha elections, the Samata's share of 90 seats is disproportionate to its strength. "The only loser in this seat adjustment is the BJP," remarked party vice-president J.P. Mathur.

But the real reason for the perceptible shift in its preferences for the JD (U) is the realisation that the castes represented by the Sharad Yadav faction have a more decisive say than those by the Samata in clinching the election outcome.

The BJP therefore seems ready to back Ram Vilas Paswan's claim to chief ministership if it cannot push forward its own candidate for the state's top job in the event of the combine's electoral success. "Leaders like Paswan have an appeal among the Dalits and

that will benefit the combine," Mr Mathur insisted. The BJP, in other words, would prefer Mr Paswan to the Samata Party's Nitish Kumar.

According to BJP sources, a secret survey commissioned by the party to gauge the public mood and relevance of different issues seems to have suggested that the question of development had greater appeal for the citizenry than any other issue.

The BJP has accordingly decided to incorporate in its election manifesto a reconstruction plan for the state which is being worked out by its in-house experts.

The party, which enjoys support among the OBCs and forward castes, apparently feels that as far as its social base is concerned,

the threat is much less from the JD (U) than from an ambitious and assertive Samata. The sudden chill in Samata leader George Fernandes' relations with top BJP leaders is said to be a major factor behind the senior partner's closer proximity to the JD (U).

The Samata Party's leadership, however, sees this as a breach of trust and an attempt to ignore the fact that it was the first to revolt against Laloo Prasad Yadav's rule by breaking away from the Janata fold on the issue of corruption.



R.V. Paswan



Nitish Kumar

THE TIMES OF INDIA

25 JAN 2000

49-12

ASSEMBLY POLLS IN BIHAR

IF THE PARTNERS of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) had agreed initially to fight the coming State Assembly elections in Bihar as a combine, it was only because they were left with no other option. The ground realities are such that nothing short of complete unity among them could ensure a meaningful fight against Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav. The leaders of the BJP, the Samata Party and the JD(U) could not have ignored this aspect even while they bargained hard. And if they are seen quarrelling with each other and are now sending signals that the combine may not remain intact, it is only because each of the parties was unwilling to let go an opportunity for having its own nominee as the Chief Minister. On the face of it, there are three aspirants — Mr. Sushil Kumar Modi, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan and Mr. Nitish Kumar — to the post in the event of the combine beating Mr. Laloo Yadav's RJD in the polls. There were no such stakes in the Lok Sabha elections facilitating a complete unity among them leading to Mr. Laloo Yadav's own defeat in Madhepura apart from the crushing blow suffered by the RJD in terms of the number of seats in the Lok Sabha.

It is indeed true that the BJP-led alliance, after the agreement on the number of seats arrived, even if it was after some wrangling, is a strong force against Mr. Laloo Yadav's party. Mr. Laloo Yadav will be fighting the polls all alone this time; the CPI(M), the Samajwadi Janata Party and the Janata Dal(S) are outfits which will have to depend on Mr. Laloo Yadav's support base rather than contribute in any substantive sense to the RJD's share of votes. As for the Congress(I), after having reached a stage of virtual decimation since it lost power in the State in 1990, the party managed some seats in the Lok Sabha in the past couple of elections,

thanks to its alliance with the RJD. And yet, the party high command decided a couple of months ago to sever ties with Mr. Laloo Yadav. There have hardly been any visible signs of the party organisation being restored in the State. The party high command seems to have been guided by the expectation that the social chemistry as it worked in Uttar Pradesh in the last elections will do so in Bihar also — with the upper caste reacting against the Laloo Yadav regime to return to its fold. But then, the fact is that the BJP-Samata combine has occupied that space for long — in fact, this political space was appropriated by the combine from the Congress(I) as early as in the 1996 general elections — and it remains to be seen as to whether the Congress(I) can break any ground this time around.

Yet another significant development in the context of the Bihar Assembly polls is the coming together of the CPI and the CPI(ML- Liberation) to forge a "third front" that includes Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party too. Apart from marking an interesting turn in the context of the polemics on Left unity, this combination could make a substantial difference to the outcome in several constituencies in Central and North Bihar. The steady growth registered by the CPI(ML-Liberation) ever since it entered the electoral scene a decade ago along with the traditional support base enjoyed by the CPI in the State can alter the outcome in several seats; while it is another matter as to whether this combine will be able to manage any major presence in the Assembly, the coming together of these two parties will certainly dampen the BJP-Samata- JD(U) hopes to draw upon the anti-incumbency factor and benefit out of that. All these factors make the coming elections to the Bihar State Assembly interesting to watch.

Laloo's last laugh

Why are NDA constituents keen to make his task easy?

WHAT a long trek it has been from Madhepura to Danapur. When in October Laloo Prasad Yadav was comprehensively trounced at the hustings, epitaphs to his 10-year-long reign were already being penned. The break-up of his formidable social alliance and the unity forged by the National Democratic Alliance in the 1999 general elections were deemed to have marked the beginning of the end for this performer with a sola topi hairdo. Certainly, a return to Patna's 1 Anne Marg may still remain an impossibility for Laloo and his chief ministerial spouse, but the three-pronged combine of the BJP, the Samata Party and the Janata Dal (United) has only splattered with obstacles what should have been a cakewalk. And by default the Rashtriya Janata Party has been able to make something of a fight out of what would have been a hopeless campaign.

Make no mistake. For all the self-defeating quibbling between the Samata Party and the JD(U), the BJP-led alliance still wields considerable advantage in the Bihar elections. No matter that its constituents are — at least for the moment — locked in a "friendly" contest in practically half the 108 seats going to the polls in the first phase on February 12. No matter that inter-party compulsions have prevented them from confidently projecting one chief ministerial candidate. But it is an advantage that they will have to work extremely hard to consolidate, by fashioning the unity that paid such handsome dividends in the Lok Sabha elections. And the Samata Party's contin-

ued obstinacy over the number of seats it wants to contest will definitely not help matters. There are two ways to assess the Bihar electoral scene. One is in purely psephological terms. Clearly, it is a three-way fight — the two main players being the RJD and the NDA, with the Congress and the CPI-led alliance making it a triangular contest in their areas of influence. But if the internecine NDA battles continue, the result could be four-cornered contests and a fracturing of its proven upper-lower-caste alliance.

However, to view the forthcoming assembly elections merely in terms of vote share would be extremely unfair to the people of Bihar. A decade ago Laloo ascended power with promises of fomenting a total revolution. But instead of translating into reality Jayaprakash Narayan's dreams, he presided over a regime that witnessed increasing social tensions and non-delivery of the benefits of development. Instead of living up to his famous promise of providing Bihar with roads as smooth as Hema Malini's cheeks, he leaves a legacy of potholed roads and the odd electricity pole in an impoverished countryside. Instead of strides towards social justice, the nineties were punctuated with midnight massacres that only further fuelled centuries-old social cleavages. In its bid to secure power, it is this impasse that a responsible opposition must address, not petty quibbling over seat distribution. And given the daunting political space it occupied just months ago, that duty falls upon the NDA.

INDIAN EXPRESS

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People's War call to skip polls

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA, Jan. 28. — The CPI-ML (People's War), a banned Naxalite outfit, today gave a call to boycott the coming Assembly elections in Bihar. The Maoist Communist Centre has already issued the boycott call.

The People's War in its pamphlet issued by its state committee has stated that the state Assembly and the Lok Sabha have become the "den of smugglers, criminals, religious fundamentalists and corrupt elements" in the last 53 years.

"India has turned out to be a country of ailing, impoverished and illiterate masses in 53 years of parliamentary democracy." The pamphlet says: "Ten years of Laloo raj has witnessed loot of crores of rupees from the state's treasury."

The PW has appealed to the people to "boycott the poll and embark on the long-term battle to end the rule of the people's enemies... Stop the so-called leaders and candidates from entering your localities and canvass."

As many as 31 policemen were killed in various incidents of landmine blasts and bomb explosions in the Naxalite dominated areas of south and central Bihar during the last Lok Sabha polls.

The MCC and the PW had planted the landmines and exploded bombs on the police patrol vehicles to execute their poll boycott call.

Wary of the fire power of the Naxalites the state administra-

tion has already embarked on the exercise to deploy 400 companies of the paramilitary forces in five Naxalite-affected districts. The districts are Ranchi, Gumla, Hajaribagh, Chatra and Palamau.

The Election Commission has directed the Bihar government to deploy the paramilitary forces in the Naxalite-affected areas 15 days before the polls.

The state administration does not find the 400 companies of the paramilitary forces sanctioned to it, sufficient to conduct the polling in the disturbed areas. It has asked the Centre to sanction at least 800 companies of the Central forces.

The PW has claimed that it will ensure the "maximum involvement" of people in executing the poll boycott call. "We, the struggling people, are determined to stop this farce of holding elections and getting the so-called mandate."

The PW has made Mr Ram Vilas Paswan a special target of its attack. "A rabid anti-Dalit and opportunist leader like Ram Vilas Paswan has formed the Janata Dal (United)... His primary goal is to get the post of the state's Chief Minister."

It has described the BJP as a "fascist organisation" while the CPI, the CPI-M and the CPI-ML (Liberation) as "opportunist". "The Liberation has thoroughly been trapped into the quagmire of the electoral politics and is trying to save its identity anyhow."

THE STATESMAN

29 JAN 2000

BJP Bihar report blames Samata, JD-U

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SEATS DEADLOCK CONTINUES

NEW DELHI, Jan. 28. — The deadlock over seat-sharing in Bihar between the BJP and Samata-JD-U continued, with the former holding the Janata Parivar responsible for the complications.

At the BJP's central election committee this evening, Mr Yashwant Sinha, special invitee, submitted his report on Bihar.

According to sources, the BJP has held both the Samata and JD-U responsible for the complications. Even though identification of seats continued to be the main problem, the party was "still hopeful of working out an agreement to defeat the RJD in the state," a leader said.

The meeting also decided to

hold back its candidates' list till a settlement was reached. The three parties are now expected to hold further discussions on the issue, supposedly clinched last Sunday after Mr LK Advani intervened.

The BJP has not withdrawn any of its 80 candidates for the first phase of polls. To deal with the "inevitable" overlapping of allied candidates, the party's "formula," announced by Mr M Venkaiah Naidu, is: "If a settlement is reached in a couple of days, the parties will ask the additional candidates to retire. The parties have to make a public announcement of retired candidates."

The Samata Party, however, softened its stand today. It

would ask candidates who weren't able to withdraw in time for the first phase of polling, to retire in favour of NDA candidates, the party said.

The Samata has now decided to contest 30 seats in the first phase.

"Our attempt would be to not let the anti-Laloo votes split. We are determined to go for meaningful seat-sharing arrangements," Ms Jaya Jaitley, the Samata acting president, said here.

But there has been no interaction with the JD-U, she said. "We have left it to the BJP to arbitrate on seat adjustments."

Ms Jaitley admitted there had been confusion because of

the short time in which seats deals had to be hammered out. "Which is why we directed our candidates to file papers from 45 constituencies for the first phase. Now we have decided to contest 30 seats in the first phase".

The party is confident that things would further clear up after the four NDA partners get to know which constituencies they have been allotted. "We have been given 90 seats and we will contest within that limit," she said.

Samata leaders have told BJP central leaders to consider the party's strongholds while allocating constituencies in central Bihar. Districts like Gaya, Jehanabad, Nawada, Rohtas and Aurangabad have a strong Samata base, Ms Jaitley pointed out.

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Pullout threat by BPP

NDA parties

bury the

hatchet to

fight Laloo

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 30. — The warring NDA constituents today decided to close their ranks and put up a combined fight to overthrow what they called Mr Laloo Yadav's decade-old "jungle raj" in Bihar.

The JD-U president, Mr Sharad Yadav, the acting president of the Samata Party, Mrs Jaya Jaitley, and the BJP's Bihar president, Mr Kailashpati Mishra, declared here today: "We have buried the hatchet. The acrimony and differences are things of the past. We are one and united to end the jungle raj of Mr Laloo Yadav in Bihar".

The only crack in the NDA was the absence of Mr Anand Mohan Singh of the Bihar People's Party who stayed away from the Press conference and did not append his signature on the joint declaration pledging that there would be no overstepping the limits of constituencies earmarked for each party in the fray. Apparently not happy with the 20 seats allotted to it, the BPP leader has threatened to pull out of the NDA. However, his party is hardly a political force to reckon with in Bihar.

The major alliance partners in the NDA also pledged to launch a joint campaign in

Bihar under a common manifesto. But each party will contest the polls on its own symbol as was the case in the Lok Sabha elections of 1999. "We can only assure you (the media) that the NDA will fight the Assembly elections as one force as it did in the Lok Sabha and the results will be spectacular", Mr Sharad Yadav said.

Despite today's show of unity, there are at least 30-40 constituencies where the NDA

SECOND SEAT

PATNA, Jan. 30. — Besides Danapur, Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav will contest the Raghapur seat which he had won in 1995 by a margin of more than 100,000 votes. All the accused in Rs 1,000-crore fodder scam cases figure in the RJD list for the second phase of the Assembly elections in Bihar. The RJD supremo released the list today. — SNS

(Details on page 8)

candidates are in the fray, opposing one another. The state and central leaders of the alliance have decided to direct the rebel candidates to retire. Should they refuse to abide by the directive they might be expelled from the party.

The alliance also agreed that it would not project any individual as its prospective chief ministerial candidate in Bihar.

At the end of a meeting today, the JD-U, Samata and the BJP were able to thrash out the intricate issue of identifying constituencies for their respective candidates. In the joint declaration, each party released the names and number of the constituencies — BJP (150), Samata (90), JD-U (64) and the BPP (20). Tomorrow is the last date of filing of the nomination papers for the second phase of polling in Bihar.